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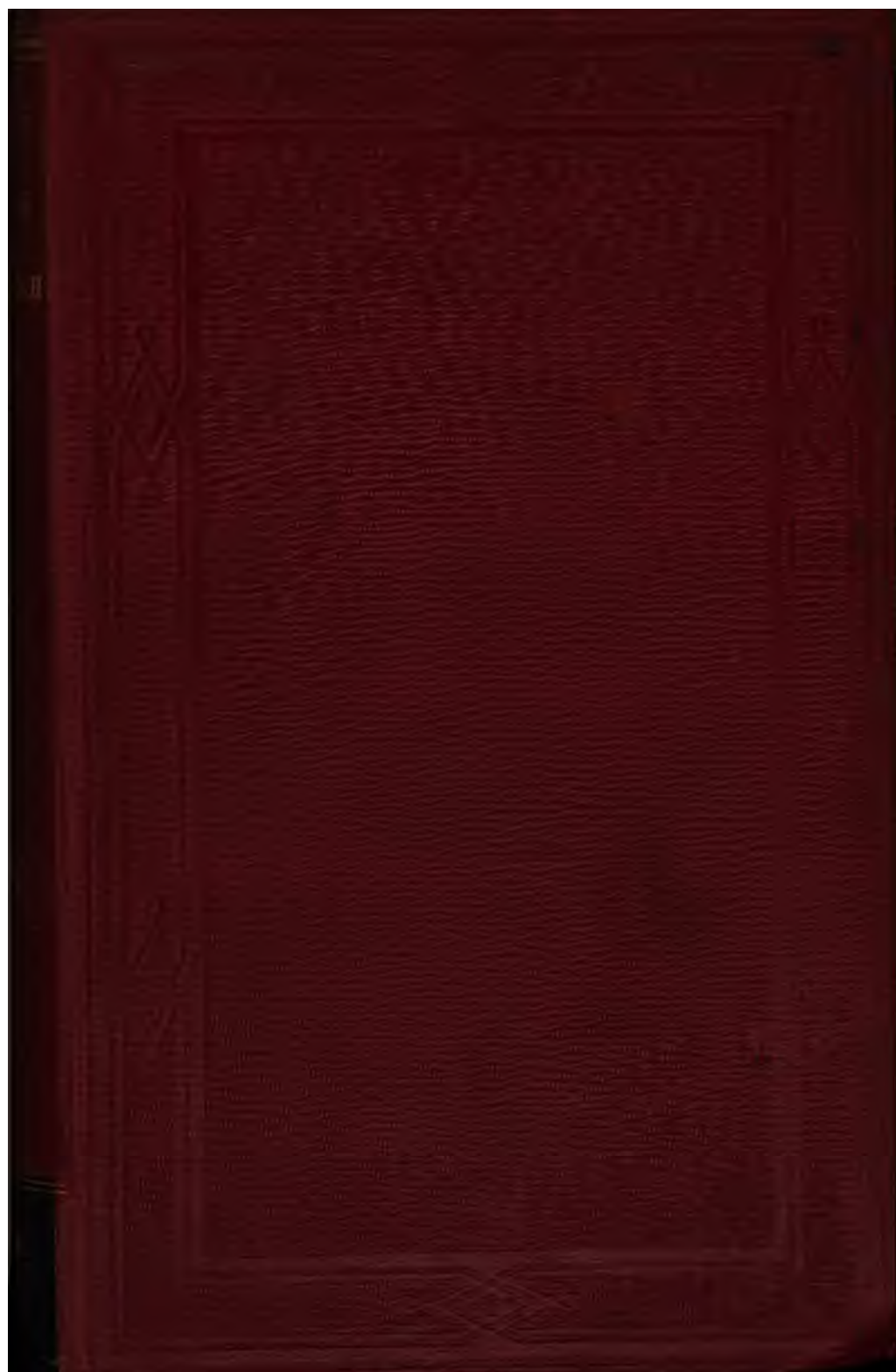
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THE
HEIRS OF CHEVELEIGH.

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THE
HEIRS OF CHEVELEIGH.

BY
GERVAISE ABBOTT.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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THE
HEIRS OF CHEVELEIGH.

CHAPTER I.

7 "Tones of the dark mountain, where springs, in melody gushing,
Pour their dreamy waters down to some antient river."
R. LARGE.

"CAN any thing in all the world, any creation of art or nature, be more beautiful, more surpassingly lovely, than the fair young face of woman?

"Of course, of course, it is not *that*, the external attribute, the mere casket of the gem, which makes her so worshipful in man's sight; to think otherwise, wrap it in what disguise of smooth numbers and polished imagery you will, is but the base conception of the sensualist. No, indeed; it is something impalpable to mere sense; the purity, the grace of a

being of more refined instincts; the gentle pleading, the trustfulness, the matchless union of bright, happy mirth, with the tenderest compassion; the sympathy of hand, and voice, and eye with all pain and all sorrow; that twines round man's heart the love, stronger and faster than the grip of death itself, for those fair beings who, like spirits, glide in and out of his home and around his daily path, actually in many cases the good angels of his toiling and mercenary existence. But still, reverently guarding this higher prerogative of woman's nature, *can* any thing possess the attributes of mere material beauty in a higher degree than such an exquisite face and form, for instance, as that in the window? One cannot analyse in the way some men do, discussing the separate features of a lovely face, as if they were the points of a horse; but still, when one's eyes *do* happen to look up, and see such a faultless creature in front of them—that long, exquisitely fine flaxen hair, that brow like the veriest alabaster, that small oval face, with its tiny little mouth, almost touching the slender tapering nose (no wonder she sings so well); its lips, which must have been painted that vermilion colour; its two roguish dimples, burrowing as they do into each corner of the mouth, and its saucy-looking little chin underneath; and then

those eyes—*what* eyes!—placed so close together in the head; with such a naïve expression, half simplicity, and half wickedness (just like that Spanish picture at Blenheim), in the dip of the brow above them, and with such a dancing light in them, and yet so much earnestness and depth of soul too.— Oh! she is magically pretty! How my susceptible cousin Worthington would have raved about her! It's a good thing, I daresay, that I'm so impervious to female beauty myself, else, perhaps, on quitting my kind entertainers here (and really my ancle is all but well now), I might have left some sections of my heart behind me, which would have shown no great wisdom under the circumstances. However, there's no fear of that; as Worthington says, 'I've no sentiment in me.'"

Reader, we are not labouring under temporary derangement; the foregoing reflections, which all crowded into a space of time inconceivably less than we have taken to write them, are not our own, but those of Edgar Harcourt, Esq., as he lay on the sofa in the old drawing-room at Plas Newydd, and, raising his eyes from the volume which he had been perusing with more or less attention, allowed them to rest for a moment on the fair form of our friend Lucy. The latter, the day being somewhat dark, had

removed her work near the window, which overlooked the river, and was at present standing close to the pane, engaged, without any surmise of the train of thought which she had thus called into existence, in the absorbing occupation of threading her needle.

Who was Edgar Harcourt, and what was he doing at Plas Newydd? The question can hardly be considered unreasonable; and we shall proceed to discharge our duty as historians, in supplying the answer.

Now, in strictness, it might be enough to answer succinctly, that Edgar Harcourt was the son of old Harcourt; and that what he was doing at Plas Newydd was apparently, in spite of his very decided convictions to the contrary, falling in love as rapidly as circumstances would admit with Lucy Akehurst. But as such an explanation might perhaps be deemed rather curt and unsatisfactory, we shall proceed to furnish one more in detail.

Edgar Harcourt, then, was an Oxford undergraduate, of an age rather beyond that at which the University career usually terminates, for he was nearly twenty-three. This was owing to a serious illness with which he had been attacked some years before, and which had left its traces in a constitution not permanently impaired, but liable to break down under any undue exertion or excitement, and which,

added to a weakness of sight, arising from the same cause, had materially interfered with his academical studies. Harcourt's father was a clergyman in the neighbourhood of Oxford, and he was himself destined for the same profession. Mr. Harcourt senior was not wealthy; but his son's election to a scholarship at his college had lightened in some degree the expense of his maintenance; the latter was an only child, moreover, with the exception of a married sister, some year or two older than himself, and thus, although far from affluent, had the prospect of a moderate competence.

At college young Harcourt's abilities had early attracted notice, and his career promised to be one of the highest distinction. But his health and sight broke down under the necessary application; and after a long and weary struggle, and more than one serious illness, Harcourt was obliged to procure a year's leave of absence from his college. This interval, which he passed at home, considerably recruited his strength; and, in the spring preceding that at which our story has now arrived, Harcourt resumed his studies. Unhappily, the work again proved too much for him; and on returning for the October term, after a long vacation in Wales, the symptoms of illness, and especially the debility of

sight, returned with increased violence. Harcourt's medical attendant now stated it as his decided opinion, that while there was every probability of the ultimate restoration both of the sight and general health, yet that this could only be insured by an immediate cessation from the severer forms of mental labour; and Harcourt, who could not but feel the truth of this assertion, reluctantly acquiesced in the necessity, frequently urged by his father, of passing an ordinary examination, without engaging in the exciting and laborious competition for honours. This took place in the commencement of the year, the events of which we are now detailing; at the same time, the medical man having again recommended a temporary absence from college, Harcourt procured a further leave for two terms, intending, in the autumn of the same year, to return permanently to his studies, which, for the ordinary examination, would in his case entail no serious amount of thought. Meanwhile the lighter branches of reading had not been interdicted; even a certain daily quantity of work was permitted, provided it did not unduly try the sight or strength for the time being; and Harcourt accordingly at his father's suggestion, after passing some weeks at home, again packed up his books, and prepared to settle

for the spring and summer in some quiet neighbourhood, where the change of air and scene might promote his entire recovery to health; while at the same time, he would be at liberty to pursue as far as was prudent his favourite branches of study. Harcourt had no difficulty in selecting a suitable spot for this purpose. His long vacation of the year before had been passed, as we have mentioned, in Wales. His residence had then been fixed at a beautiful but secluded village, a kind of spa of considerable native repute, although almost unknown to tourists, near the town from which Mrs. Akehurst and Lucy procured post-horses on their first arrival at Plas Newydd, and which was in fact the principal market-town of the district. Harcourt had been originally attracted to this part of the country by a letter of introduction which had been given him to the venerable incumbent of Llanfihangel uwch y graig, the village we have described as lying a few miles lower down the valley than Plas Newydd. Mr. Evans, the incumbent in question, gladly welcomed his young friend; but as no convenient lodgings offered in the valley of the Hirnant, Harcourt's reading party had ultimately fixed themselves at the spa, where several houses offered suitable for the purpose. As enthusiastic in his love for nature,

especially for the wild mountain scenery which he now saw for the first time, as he was in his devotion to the imperishable creations of beauty and grandeur which peopled the classical world of thought, in which he was an accomplished student, Harcourt caught with delight at the prospect of a return to the picturesque district which he had only partially explored in the preceding year; and having ascertained that his lodgings were again vacant, he removed there about the same time that Mrs. Akehurst took her departure from Plas Newydd for the London season. Harcourt, although liable, as we have said, to serious illness from over study, was a strong, stout walker, and never better in health than when he could force himself to throw aside his books, and take up his rod and basket (for he was a keen fisherman) for a day's sport, or else ramble by the hour together over the moors and valleys which opened in every direction round his present residence; and, notwithstanding the early period of the year, many and various were the expeditions which he contrived and executed without mischief, to localities which, in the ears of his worthy landlady at the little spa, sounded like visits to the Antipodes; and of which we might detail to the reader nu-

merous interesting particulars, were it not that we hasten on to more attractive matter.

Within an easy distance, as Harcourt would have termed a walk of seven or eight miles, lay Mr. Evans's parish, "the church of St. Michael Undercliff," as we may Saxonise it for the reader's benefit, and which, when describing it by its Welsh name, we shall hereafter, with the same view, designate only as Llanfihangel, omitting the sonorous, but certainly rather difficult addition of "uwch y graig." Of Mr. Evans, his church and himself, we shall speak more at length hereafter; suffice it for the present to say, that by Harcourt the old man was regarded with cordial admiration and esteem, and that his visits to Llanfihangel were numerous in proportion. In the course of conversation, about a fortnight after Mrs. Akehurst's departure for town, Mr. Evans alluded incidentally to the new comers at Plas Newydd: "He had called there, but had not seen Mrs. Akehurst, and the visit had not yet been returned." Harcourt listened with no peculiar interest, although Mr. Evans certainly spoke of a young lady as well as a more elderly one. "Cousin Worthington" was quite right in one sense of the word; Harcourt had no "sentiment;" that is to say, he had not that susceptibility

of temperament which is impressed, almost to the pitch of love-making, with every fair face it encounters; still less had he the connoisseur's taste in female beauty, or the least power or wish to analyse the respective claims of its possessors, or parade in public the verbiage of a maudlin assumption of the tender passion, as novelists call it. Too deep, far too deep for this, in the very shrine and inmost recess of the young student's heart, dwelt a yet unrealised, unimaged, dream of woman's love, as something bright and beautiful beyond words; a charmed existence, like the golden bough of the sibyl, whose lustre, invisible to those who approached it with unpurified or careless gaze, would beam on the eyes of its duly qualified votary through the densest mazes of the forest. It was partly from the loftiness and rare beauty of the ideal he had thus unconsciously sketched out for himself, and partly from a natural diffidence of character, which disposed Harcourt, especially in female society, to be bashful and reserved, that he had cherished in his mind a firmly-rooted delusion, still more dangerous in its consequences than that suggested by Cousin Worthington; the conviction, namely, which he had accepted wholly without question, that he was inaccessible (or, to use his own phrase, impervious) to

the influence of the charms which he thus worshipped at a remote distance. This was further encouraged by Harcourt's own student life, and by the limited means and seclusion of his father, who, since the death of his wife some years before, entered little into society. So that, up to the period when we have had the pleasure of introducing our undergraduate to the reader's notice, he had practically never known female society; perhaps had never in his life spent five minutes alone with any one of the fairer sex who even in externals approached in any degree the model his poet-dream had shaped out. Never having been under fire, he fancied himself invulnerable. Alas! poor Harcourt!

On the present occasion, as we have already said, Harcourt listened with stoical indifference to the account given by Mr. Evans of the arrival of his new neighbours; an event in which the worthy clergyman naturally expressed some interest, the house having been for a considerable period unlet. Harcourt's attention, however, was attracted by his informant's statement to the scenery of the upper part of the valley, which he had never hitherto explored above Llanfihangel; and taking his leave, he pursued the road, by which we have already conducted the reader, to Plas Newydd and the head of the glen. Har-

court was much struck with the wild beauty of the latter, and he frequently repeated his visit, exploring on one occasion the dark recesses of the Dall Cwm; on another, the wild moors from which its grassy slopes descended; on another, the smaller lateral glen, itself abounding in picturesque features, which we have already mentioned as opening into the main valley of the Hirnant, nearly at the point where Plas Newydd lay. One spot in this lateral glen became a great favourite with Harcourt; it was a narrow point or spur of rock, caused by a bifurcation of the glen, and terminating in a sharp cliff, naturally almost precipitous, and in parts rendered entirely so by the excavation of its sides for stone; originally, perhaps, commenced when the new house was built, and since continued from time to time as the occasional repairs of the dwellings and rude fences of the small hamlet adjoining Plas Newydd, led to its being quarried for the same purpose. The view from the extreme projection of this cliff was one of singular beauty; the deep ravine on each side, with its wooded banks and echoing torrent, contrasting happily with the more open vale of the Hirnant, and the rugged mountains which rose from its upper extremity. A rough cart and foot road led up one side of the cliff we have described, in its only prac-

ticable part; beyond, this degenerated into a mere footpath, leading to some farm buildings at a distance, and ultimately emerging upon the moor at the point where the lower ridge, of which the spur formed the termination, detached itself from the main chain.

For some time Harcourt had never followed the path we have last mentioned further than a short distance along the ridge, in order to observe the view from different points. He had an excellent map of the district, however, and having by a comparison of localities satisfied himself that this path would communicate with another, indicated in the map as running across the moor from the place of his present temporary residence in a different direction, he determined, one brilliant morning, about the beginning of May, to start by the latter route; and having ascertained the connection of the two paths, return by Plas Newydd and the Hirnant valley home; a walk probably of some twenty or twenty-five miles. We must not trespass upon the reader's patience by any lengthened detail of our pedestrian's solitary ramble. Suffice it to say that, as often happens in such excursions, he found the route indicated on the map exceedingly different from that which existed in actual fact. Often, where the hydrographer had laid down, with entire truth and accuracy, no doubt, at

the time the map was constructed, a well-defined, firm road, the insidious advance of the bog and moss had obliterated, perhaps for half a mile or more, all vestiges of the route, which would then unexpectedly recur to view for a few hundred yards, and again disappear as suddenly. Again, the track, even when these difficulties were surmounted, lay transversely across the general line of the ridges of moorland, occasioning the necessity of a frequent descent into a deep hollow, which the path crossed and again mounted as rapidly on the opposite side, thus doubling or trebling the time which the actual distance traversed would otherwise have required.

It was accordingly with some feelings of uneasiness, that as the disc of the sun, even from the height where Harcourt stood, drew ominously near the edge of one of the long shapeless swells of the moor which bounded the horizon, he found himself at the upper end of a long morass between hills, which evidently, from the indications of the map, and the position of the sun and surrounding objects, formed the point where he must now turn away from the comparatively obvious track which he had hitherto pursued, and which now trended rapidly away in the opposite direction; and by following the morass downwards, endeavour to hit upon the path which, as

he was already aware, and as we have endeavoured to explain to the reader, led along the projecting ridge of the lateral valley to Plas Newydd. Once arrived at the latter point, and Harcourt had the road all the way home; so that for this part of the walk the absence of daylight would be unimportant. Rapidly did Harcourt take in the particulars of the position we have detailed, and with the important object of being off the mountain, if possible, before dark, press on at his best speed down the rugged and pathless morass. The season had fortunately been one of great drought, and the moor in consequence was passable in every direction; but it was desperately hard work, a series of jumps, in fact, from one huge ridge of the caked peat to another, the treacherous black moss lying, like the crevices of a glacier, between the wave-like masses which alone admitted the tread.

The sun had set a considerable time before Harcourt achieved this portion of the task. He was gratified, however, to see by the uncertain light which still prevailed, that the point at which the ridge for which he was aiming separated from the main body of the moor, was at no great distance, although divided from him by a deep gloomy valley, in which he heard the roar of a small waterfall. The time ad-

mitted of no delay ; plunging down the wooded side of the glen, Harcourt soon reached the bottom. But here the path, which from the lower end of the morass had been unusually good, instead of crossing the stream, mounted rapidly, and appeared to lead in an upward direction along its course : — Harcourt discovered by a subsequent visit that it crossed the stream, in fact, *under* the waterfall, which, by the peculiar configuration of the rock, is projected almost in a semicircle from the top, and on more than one occasion has actually sheltered the dalesman or admiring tourist from a shower of rain. This natural causeway was, of course, wholly unknown to our pedestrian. Feeling the importance of every moment to his safety, he plunged into the water (which even at the present season was breast high), forced his way up the opposite bank, and after a wearisome struggle, occupying some time, through the dense brushwood, again, much to his delight, regained the path he had deserted.

His satisfaction, however, was damped when, on finally emerging on the ridge of which he had been in quest, Harcourt saw how much the light had diminished in the interval. He could now with difficulty see smaller objects a few yards before him ; in the distance, standing out dimly against the sky, he

believed he made out the farm buildings which he had seen from the further extremity of the path as it descended on Plas Newydd; but the distance of the buildings, if such they were, from the point where he stood, was very considerable. At the farm, however, he hoped to procure a lantern and guide, and pressed on accordingly with vigour; it was, in fact, his only chance. After numerous difficulties and interruptions, and just as it fell pitch dark, Harcourt reached the farm towards which he had been hastening. He had been rather surprised, for some time past, at the absence of lights in the windows, and now rapidly strode round the house to find some mode of admission. He might have entered where he would.

By a vicissitude of frequent occurrence in a region where stone is so plentiful, the buildings were deserted; doors without their lintels, and gaping chasms in the place of windows, showed that the desertion had not been of recent occurrence. At the same instant, with a spirit of aggravation, highly characteristic (as most tourists know by experience) of the Welsh weather, which is always most unfavourable just as the way is lost, or the pedestrian otherwise involved in hopeless difficulties, and, in fact, deserves all the opprobrium it generally meets with, it began to rain heavily. Harcourt's position was

now really critical : to have passed the night in the roofless buildings would, with his tendency to complaint, have been certain death ; to push on seemed little less, but it was the only course.

Bitterly repenting his own folly, and only glad that no one else was involved in it, Harcourt pressed forwards, stumbling at every step over mounds, bushes, and broken ground ; the path was now utterly invisible. A dim kind of line, wholly uncertain as to its greater or less distance, marked the direction of the ravine on each side, showing that Harcourt had now reached the point where the ridge narrowed ; at its extreme end lay, as he knew but too well, the precipitous rock with its lofty scarped quarries, terminating in a sharp, needle-shaped projection, where a false step would be certain death. How to hit the path, which, as we have stated, wound down the only practicable side, and with this driving, blinding rain ?

Harcourt was bold, but his heart literally sank within him. He proceeded, however, very cautiously, but with all his caution tripping every instant, through the singular illusion as to size and distance, which affects the sight when the light is dim and precarious. At length Harcourt fancied that something white gleamed on one side of him ; it was in the

direction of the road down the cliff, and apparently close at hand. Eagerly he pushed forward, the white object, whatever it was, still retaining its position. Harcourt fancied that a few steps must now place him within reach of it, when, with a sudden jerk, and an ineffectual attempt to draw back his right foot (which, instead of planting on the ground as he had intended, he found actually resting in air), he was precipitated down the face of a rock of considerable height, and fell heavily among the brushwood and loose rubbish at the bottom, his ankle being twisted under him in the fall, and apparently, by the intense pain he experienced, sprained violently. The fall, however, as Harcourt found by a subsequent visit to the spot, had saved his life. What he had supposed to be the road, was, in fact, the narrow projecting spur, hardly a foot wide, of the rock itself; once advanced upon that, and in the darkness and uncertainty of every step, nothing short of a miracle could have prevented his being dashed to pieces down its sheer precipices. As it was, he had unconsciously been pursuing a direction rather too much to one side, and in doing so had fallen from a height considerable enough to occasion serious injury, but less formidable than that on which, in another moment, his foot would have been planted. He was

now, in fact, in one of the ravines which met just below the scarpèd rock; on a bank almost precipitous, but just admitting of the tread.

Slowly and painfully, his injured foot requiring almost incredible fortitude to admit of his making the necessary exertion for the purpose, Harcourt forced his way down the ravine, and, gaining the road from the quarry, reached the dilapidated stone gate of Plas Newydd. But the effort had been too great for a frame which, although capable of much active exertion, was not constitutionally strong; and the housemaid, who was attracted to the gate some twenty minutes after Harcourt had reached it, by the violent and incessant barking of a small favourite spaniel of Lucy's, came back with the startling intelligence that there was a young gentleman lying stark dead on the gravel walk.

CHAP. II.

——— "How merrily a year
Passed like a summer's day, when he was there."
CASELTON.

WE will not weary the reader by detailing the ready-handed kindness with which Aunt Witherby, when the drenched and still swooning sufferer was carried into the house, after satisfying herself that animation was not extinct, applied the appropriate remedies for such an emergency; or the satisfaction with which Lucy, who had at first gazed with deep sorrow on the form which for some minutes lay stretched, apparently lifeless, on the sofa in the old drawing-room, watched the successful issue of her aunt's treatment, and the look of returning intelligence which gradually spread itself over the refined and thoughtful although not strictly handsome features, and at length (as the drooping lids slowly raised themselves from the cheek) filled the deep blue eyes, of singular pathos and expression, with the light of restored consciousness, mingled with surprise and interest at the scene

which so unexpectedly met their gaze. The look of pain, however, which followed Harcourt's recovery from his swoon attracted Mrs. Witherby's attention, and she soon ascertained its cause in the injured ankle. Harcourt apologised earnestly for the trouble he was giving, and even rose with some intention of pursuing his way home; but this Aunt Witherby absolutely forbade; in fact it was evidently impossible: Harcourt tottered again before he had advanced a few steps. Old Jenkin's assistance being hastily summoned, Harcourt, leaning on his arm (for he refused to allow himself to be carried), contrived, with no small pain and difficulty, to achieve the walk upstairs to a room which Mrs. Witherby had hastily ordered to be got ready for him. Here, applying such remedies as her surgery could suggest to the injured limb, and despatching Jenkin to the post town we have spoken of for medical assistance, Mrs. Witherby, pressing her finger to her lip to check the thanks and expressions of regret which Harcourt could not help pouring forth, left her patient to repose.

The doctor did not arrive until the following morning, for he had been attending a case of serious illness in exactly the opposite direction to Plas Newydd; when he did appear, he was accompanied

by the worthy incumbent of Llanfihangel. Old Jenkin in returning through the little village, had stopped at the small public house to refresh himself and communicate the news; and Mr. Evans had received intelligence of the accident early next morning, the sufferer in which, he entertained little doubt from the description given by Jenkin, was his friend Edgar Harcourt. The doctor had but limited accommodation in his own humble parsonage, for many years previous to his incumbency occupied as a cottager's abode of the poorer class, but in which, although his income from the living would have justified a much more ambitious residence, the good old man had for some time past lived with a solitary servant, an old housekeeper. He warmly pressed Harcourt, however, to avail himself of such hospitality as it was in his power to offer; while Harcourt himself, fearful of trespassing upon his present kind entertainers, earnestly petitioned to be removed to his own lodgings; but the doctor, stoutly seconded by Mrs. Witherby, peremptorily forbade either course. "He had no wish," he said, "to discourage his patient about himself; probably, in the course even of a day or two he might be got out of bed, and allowed to come down to the drawing-room; but, excepting as far as might be required for this

purpose, he must entirely forbid Mr. Harcourt to use his foot in any manner; a severe attack of erysipelas might be the consequence of disobedience. For two or three weeks, at least, he must consider himself quite a prisoner." At Plas Newydd, accordingly, Harcourt was to remain; indeed the medico, at Mrs. Witherby's thoughtful request, had brought him up a supply of necessaries from his own lodgings.

The surgeon's opinion proved correct in both particulars. As regarded the first, Harcourt found himself able to descend to the drawing-room on the second day; while as respects the second part of the prediction, it was not until the day on which we first introduced him to the reader at the commencement of this chapter, which was quite a fortnight from the accident, that his ankle had at all recovered sufficiently to admit of his walking. How was the interval spent by the present three inmates of Plas Newydd?—How would the reader wish it to have been?

Now, in Aunt Witherby's daily course of life the arrival of their new visitor, except by entailing a slight addition to her domestic cares, produced very little alteration. All the afternoons and evenings she stitched and knitted, spoke when spoken to (and

Harcourt soon found a sincere pleasure in drawing out the home recollections and quaint goodness of the genial old lady), and sate silent when others were talking, with as pleasant a smile upon her face as if the whole conversation had been addressed to herself. During the forenoons, Aunt Witherby, who had been left in full charge by Mrs. Akehurst, and had a strong natural turn for housekeeping, occupied herself in that department with an enthusiasm which left her little time for general society. Now it was imperative, Aunt Witherby felt, that their invalid visitor should not be left alone; and accordingly, at these daily periods of her withdrawal into the arcana of domestic life, the good lady left Miss Lucy Akehurst as her *locum tenens* in the drawing-room, with a strict injunction that she was "to try and amuse the poor young man; although," Mrs. Witherby added, "I don't suppose that such a little chit as you," (for her aunt always looked upon Lucy as the little fair-haired creature of five years old, whom she recollected playing about in the drawing-room of Cheveleigh, and in fact seemed incapable of presenting her to her contemplation in any other point of view—) "I don't suppose that such a little chit as you will be able to be much entertainment to Mr. Harcourt, for I hear from Mr.

1

Evans that he is a great scholar, so very learned and clever. He has not been particularly strong, Mr. Evans says; but if it had not been for this, he would have carried away all the honours at his college."

To tell the truth, for the first morning or two of this enforced *tête-à-tête*, Lucy and her companion did *not* appear to make much progress in each other's society. The former, in spite of Harcourt's agreeable manner and the pleasant kindness of his voice and eye, felt very genuinely afraid of such a prodigy of learning as Aunt Witherby had depicted; while Harcourt, on his part, did not feel his natural bashfulness at all diminished by being thrown into such near society with one who, as his eyes slowly opened from the dull lethargy of the swoon on the night of his accident, had risen before them as an impersonation, for the first time in his life, of the lofty dream of female loveliness which had hitherto wandered in vague uncertain shadows through his heart and brain. Indeed, it may be recorded as one of the inconsistencies of human character, that Harcourt's recollection of his first glance at the fair creature who bent over him on the night of his swoon with such mournful and deep compassion, although it had very much stimulated his subsequent progress from

his own room to the region of her presence downstairs, did seem at first materially to impede his attempts at conversation when there.

To the aid of those who were certainly intended to know each other better, came the illustrious poet Tasso; and he came on this wise. On the second morning of their rather silent *tête-à-tête*, Lucy, feeling now thoroughly convinced of her own inability to serve as company to such a distinguished inmate, especially one, who, in spite of the intelligence which breathed in every line of his expressive features, and every glance of his deep blue eye, really seemed to have been gifted by nature with the power only of expressing himself in monosyllables, at last, as a diversion, mentioned her hoard of books in the old chamber upstairs, and proposed to fetch some for Harcourt's perusal. The offer was accepted by Harcourt with many apologies for the trouble he thus gave; and on Lucy's return with her hands full, Harcourt, who knew Italian well, selected the "Jerusalem Delivered." Now, it so happened, that Lucy (we cannot make her faultless, and must therefore apologise for her indulgence in such a reprehensible practice) had marked various passages of the author which had particularly arrested her fancy or interest; and it so happened also that these precise passages

were the favourites, as they were certain to have been of any one possessed of taste and genius, of Mr. Edgar Harcourt. And from this coincidence of thought it resulted, that the said Edgar Harcourt, after sundry misgivings and bashful half commencements — “false starts,” as they would be called on the turf, at length summoned up the courage to lay down his book, and inquire of Miss Lucy Akehurst if the pencil marks in the poem had been made by herself, and whether they indicated her preference for the passages so distinguished?

And from this very simple question, which was replied to by the said Lucy, not without a slight tinge upon her cheek — for it was almost the first time in her young life in which the treasure-house of her own deeply-stored thoughts and fancies had been approached as it were by a stranger’s footstep — ensued a long and animated conversation of a highly varied and discursive character. Lucy’s favourite authors were produced at Harcourt’s request; the passages which she had read with the most pleasure were discussed, and acquired fresh beauty and interest from their mutual criticism; while, in the foreign authors, numerous difficulties, which had hitherto perplexed Lucy in the perusal, were explained and removed by her companion, whose temporary cessa-

tion from more severe mental labour had given him the opportunity of becoming more extensively acquainted with the principal continental languages than was usual with university men at that period.

By degrees too, in these morning *séances*, to which Harcourt and Lucy both began to look forward with no small interest, and in which no reserve of a more serious nature had yet replaced the bashfulness, now so happily broken through, of their first introduction, the poet-soul of the young student developed itself more and more every day. Harcourt was no dry scholar; versed in the mere husk of literature, the intricacies and nice rules of language and composition, or the details of bare facts, but incapable of appreciating the glowing conceptions, the thoughts and sentiments of the great masters of intellect, to which the most accurate knowledge of the mere text of their writings is but the pass-key, too often unhappily in an academical career substituted for the wealth to which it gives access. On the contrary, Harcourt, although an accurate critical scholar, never perused any work, ancient or modern, without adding largely to the stores of a mind already rich in such acquisitions, and itself teeming with deep thought and poetry. Often would Harcourt, translating as he went on, quote from some of the classi-

cal authors, whose pages were, of course, without his aid a sealed book to his listener, scenes and descriptions of surpassing beauty and interest, which even in the imperfect and rapid rendering which her companion (whose command of his own language was, however, considerable) was thus able to furnish, had a singular fascination for Lucy, from the original modes of thought and remote characters and incidents to which she was thus for the first time introduced. Never did the adventures of the wandering Ulysses, the fierce battle scenes and stirring life of the Iliad, the gentleness and devotion of the blameless Alcestis, the deadly irony of the avenging Clytemnœstra; Herodotus with his quaint anecdote, or the vivid pictures of the fugitive garrison of Plataea or the beleaguered isle of Pylos which adorn the pages of the later Greek historian, find a more delighted listener than the fair girl whose work now often remained suspended as she listened with breathless attention to the new sources of interest thus presented to her. And then, Harcourt, apologising for his classical fervour, would turn away to some less abstruse topic. He would lead Lucy, whenever he saw that the subject would not be painful to her, by recalling incidents with which he soon became acquainted, as far as Lucy herself

knew them, to speak of Cheveleigh and her own young days. Owing to her father's partiality, Lucy had been early "brought out," as it is termed; and while she had lost no particle of the freshness of her own character by the introduction to society, it had furnished her numerous lively sketches of men and things, which Harcourt, who had much original humour, and a keen appreciation of it in others, capped with many a playful jest and sally. And then again the conversation would wander away to deeper and more absorbing interests, not the creations of poetry or the historic record of past times, but the daily scenes and sympathies of actual life; the bitter struggle of penury, the selfishness and matchless devotion which lie side by side even in commonplace scenes and occurrences, the touching pictures of domestic grief and joy; the mysterious influences of mind on mind; the intense depth of the feelings, unextinguishable even when the ray of intellect is quenched for ever, which agitate and impel the troubled heart of man. Sometimes, too, Harcourt even spoke of love;—the abstract quality which he revered, as all good and fine souls do, but with which *he* at least, he would fain have believed, had no personal concern. "It had always seemed to him," he said, "that Ondine was no mere

play of the author's imagination; it embodied a sacred and eternal truth. Without love, woman, however fair and graceful, wandered through life in a purposeless vague passage, like the flight of a summer insect, from one unsatisfying object to another, without ever finding, so far as earth can give it, its true happiness. But once let the soul of woman love, and it had fulfilled its destiny. Casting anchor as it were in the troubled waters of some heart hitherto lonely and dejected, it now began its true mission; soothing, ministering, winning itself fresh worship, developing fresh instincts of goodness and usefulness every day, mingling more and more, as it approached the goal, the current of work-day life, of commonplace scenes and duties, with the brightness and unclouded joy of its own angel home."

Entranced, fascinated, ignorant, unconscious, Lucy Akehurst listened and admired. For the first time she had been brought into contact with a mind capable and worthy of exercising an influence over her own. At her father's table she had from time to time met with men of brilliant power, whose conversation, rich with anecdote and humour, occasionally with deep pathos and glowing conversation, had interested, and, for the time, enthralled her. But there was nothing in the character of

the speaker himself for the mind to rest upon afterwards with interest; the high polish of the external surface, while it dazzled the eye, prevented its gaining any insight into the real nature of the gem which lay beneath. But in the mind which thus day by day poured out its treasures, as it were, at her feet, there was a freshness and reality which formed a striking contrast to anything which Lucy had met with in society. Harcourt spoke indeed well, and often eloquently. When interested in any subject, his enthusiasm broke forth in a flow of poetical and striking imagery; but this was not intended for conversational display, but was the spontaneous expression of the rich vein of thought and feeling which pervaded his own mind. There was something, Lucy felt, in the character thus presented to her, genuine and native; a power of appreciation and sympathy, a chord striking the same note as her own long-cherished thoughts, from which, whenever she ventured to draw *them* forth in any degree, she was certain of eliciting a response. Lucy quite marvelled now, at times, how she could ever have thought Plas Newydd monotonous or dull.

And so the days rolled on. Lucy was very happy. Mrs. Witherby was very happy; for Har-

court, as we have said, devoted himself with a sincere goodwill to engaging her, when in the room, in conversation on topics likely to be of interest to her; and the old lady, although always contented and cheerful under the most adverse circumstances, was nevertheless particularly fond of a pleasant chat, when she could find any one who she supposed would not consider it a burden to talk to her. Finally, Harcourt was very happy; at least he would have been so, but for a circumstance which ought to have led to exactly the opposite result; namely, the fact that his ankle, although still rather weak, was practically sufficiently recovered to allow of his now leaving Plas Newydd. This conviction forced itself upon his mind so unmistakeably upon the afternoon of the day upon which we first introduced him to the reader, that, with far greater reluctance than he could have anticipated in quitting the scene of such close confinement, and with profuse and most genuine expressions of thanks and goodwill to his kind hosts, Harcourt announced his intention of returning to his lodging on the day following. But Mrs. Witherby positively refused to sanction any such proceeding. First, the doctor had not been over for some days; and it would be most wrong for Harcourt to attempt the re-

moval without his permission. Then there was no conveyance to take his portmanteau. Then, why should he be in such a hurry to go at all? "It was very poor society for him," Mrs. Witherby said; "she was a very stupid, old-fashioned body herself, and Lucy, of course, was a mere child; but still, if he could put up with such dull people, it was the greatest possible charity his being there; for, excepting Mr. Evans, they never saw a soul from one week's end to the other." Harcourt hesitated for a moment; "Would it not appear almost rude," he reflected, "after the way in which Mrs. Witherby had put it, for him to hurry away, especially as he could not allege that he had any valid reason which could compel his departure? it would seem as if he really had found the society of his entertainers irksome, as Mrs. Witherby had said." So with a highly creditable sacrifice, as we trust the reader will consider, of inclination to the claims of gratitude and good nature, Edgar Harcourt accepted the invitation, and prolonged his stay at Plas Newydd.

"Don't you think, aunt," said Lucy, when she retired for the night, on which occasion a little chat on domestic matters usually took place in Mrs. Witherby's apartment, "don't you think that you

should write to mamma, and mention Mr. Harcourt's being here?"

"Why, you have done so, have you not?" replied her aunt.

"I have not written to mamma very lately," Lucy answered. "I wrote twice since she has been in town, but I have not heard from her; and I should not like to claim too much of her time and attention, when I have no doubt she is very much occupied all day."

"Ah! I see, my dear," replied Mrs. Witherby; "well, you are quite right; no doubt your mother has some excellent reasons for not answering; I dare say she is purchasing some handsome present for you, and means to send it down here as a surprise. However, you are quite right about Mr. Harcourt, and I will have a letter ready by the next post; that will be on Saturday, I believe."

A letter with Mrs. Witherby was a very rare occurrence. The same intellectual inertness which made her an indifferent companion in general society, interfered very much with her merits as a correspondent. Far from running off a letter with the glibness and ease which is characteristic of many of her sex, the process of epistolary composition with Mrs. Witherby was a serious and well-con-

sidered affair, requiring to be inaugurated by special preparation, and rather partaking of the grave dignity of an epic; the momentous nature of the transaction partly appearing in the length and bulk of the epistle itself, and partly in its elaborate and stately phraseology. On the present occasion, Aunt Witherby's lucubrations resulted in a somewhat closely written document of two sheets, of which we regret that want of space will only allow us to present our readers with a very brief summary. After a somewhat solemn exordium, Mrs. Witherby, reversing the golden rule of the Latin poet, and commencing her narration from the earliest period of her correspondent's departure, entered into a minute and full detail of domestic occurrences in the interval, interspersed with various reflections upon the mutability of human affairs, the stupidity of the Welsh, and the graces and accomplishments of her fair charge Lucy. Without wearying the reader with the particulars of these family records, we may observe, that they entered, in the first place, into a full narrative of the quarrel that had broken out between the English housemaid, Susan, and the Welsh cook, Myvanwy Jones; in which exhibition of human frailty Mrs. Witherby, upon a careful examination of the circumstances, appeared

rather to lean to the side of the question espoused by her own countrywoman, but added, with a dispassionate calmness, that perhaps both were more or less in the right, and that, as we lived on, we saw much to alter in the hasty views we were prone to adopt of our neighbours' conduct. The next great transaction of the period was an overflow, according to immemorial custom in the spring, of the river Hirnant, and the simultaneous descent of a large body of water through the ceiling of the best bedroom; occurrences which, as Mrs. Witherby justly observed, had kept the whole household out of their beds for the best part of the night in a state of agonising apprehension, and testified to the prodigious force and violence of the elements in this wild region. Passing over some minor details, such as the complaints preferred by the cook and housemaid of the audacity of the rats in the old house, which, instead of appearing, as they had done in the earlier days of their occupation, in an occasional flying visit to the larder or scullery, now advanced upon them in the servants' hall itself, and, as the housemaid graphically added, "six abreast;"—passing over these afflictions, and the minor evils of rusty locks, creaking doors, and decayed window-frames,—we advance rapidly to

the most engrossing topic of Mrs. Witherby's letter, which in fact occupied three pages of her last sheet, but which we must dismiss in as many lines—the downfall of a certain shelf in the storeroom with its contents, consisting of the accumulated confections and preserves of the last season; which misadventure, Mrs. Witherby implied, besides entailing on the ensuing year a destitution of those carnal satisfactions which, in the expressive language of the Greek orator, might appear as if the spring had been taken out of it, had involved the still greater catastrophe of the breakage of six bottles of choice ginger wine, four of cowslip, and five of the “best London sherry.”

This heart-rending occurrence, which took place only a few days before the letter, and was attributed by old Jenkin—who spoke very little English, and whose actual views on the subject never transpired, —to the *earwigs*, had such an absorbing effect upon Mrs. Witherby, that she actually completed her letter without remembering to say anything about Harcourt's visit, which, as involving circumstances of unusual dramatic interest, she had excluded from its chronological place in her narration, with the view of introducing it with additional effect at the close. The omission was called to the old lady's

notice by Lucy, to whom the letter was given for perusal ; but there was no help now but a postscript, for it was within a few minutes of the postman's usual arrival. Mrs. Witherby accordingly sat down to her desk, and, in less elaborate terms than before, informed her correspondent of Harcourt's accident, of his temporary sojourn and recovery at Plas Newydd, and of the circumstances under which she had ventured to press for the continuance of his visit there.

She might have spared herself the trouble. Mrs. Akehurst yawned over the housemaid's quarrel, skipped the greater part of the inundation, and, being interrupted by a visitor just as she reached the account of the refractory conduct of the dining-room door, which would never open when it was once shut, and never shut when it was once open, — deposited her kinswoman's letter in a remote drawer, in which it probably continued, unread, during the remaining portion of that worthy lady's earthly pilgrimage.

CHAP. III.

“Whence this new-born fervour? Ah!
Fatal, fatal Glycera!”

HOR. Od. i. 19. 5.

As Aunt Witherby intimated in our last chapter, Mr. Evans, the incumbent of Llanfihangel, had frequently visited Harcourt during his detention at Plas Newydd. The doctor, who came to see his patient a day or two after the latter had accepted Mrs. Witherby's pressing invitation for his continued stay, having pronounced him now convalescent and equal to moderate exercise (although anything like fatigue, he intimated, must still be avoided), Harcourt proposed to the ladies, on the first day on which he availed himself of the medical permission for anything beyond a stroll round the gardens of Plas Newydd, to pay a return visit to Llanfihangel parsonage. The day was delicious, about ten days from the end of May, the usual period when, in these mountainous regions, the approaching summer for the first time begins to make its advance sensibly felt, and clothes the sterile crags with verdure and foliage.

Both the ladies were good walkers, and enjoyed the exercise. Mrs. Witherby, the stronger of the two notwithstanding her years, could almost rival Harcourt himself in his rambles; while Lucy Akehurst felt quite equal to accomplishing the distance to the little hamlet on foot. After some ineffectual protests on the part of the old lady as to the injury likely to ensue to Harcourt from unduly testing his newly-recovered powers, the pedestrians set out, with many expressions of delight at the burst of summer in its warmth and brightness, the scent of flowers, the song of birds, and the rich colouring of even the minutest objects on their path, which we learn to appreciate so intensely after the monotonous and chilling aspect of a long winter. While they are pursuing their route to Llanfihangel, the reader will perhaps pardon us for introducing him more particularly than we have yet done to one whose memory is still green in his native vale,—the venerable Howel Evans. This gentleman was born at a small farm in the parish of Llanfihangel, but a few miles lower down the stream of the Hirnant. Having shown the promise of considerable ability, his father decided on bringing him up with the view of taking Orders; the necessary expenses of an university education being defrayed, partly by the aid of a kinsman possessed of a tolerable

property, but still more by the assiduity and frugal habits of the young scholar himself, who contrived to support himself on his relative's allowance and the emoluments of a college exhibition which had been accorded to him. About the time that he was preparing for ordination the then incumbent of Llanfihangel fell into a state of declining health, which made the employment of a curate indispensable, and Mr. Evans was selected for the purpose. His rector was a pluralist, and resided upon a living at some distance, from which he had been in the habit of riding over to perform his duty at Llanfihangel once a Sunday. There was, in fact, no suitable residence at the latter place; the old parsonage having (as we have already stated) been from time immemorial used as a labourer's cottage. Being, however, vacant at the time of Mr. Evans's appointment to the curacy, he decided on occupying this humble home, which some expenditure on repairs, and the neat and orderly habits of the occupant himself, contrived to make more habitable than could have been supposed; and never having married, (although his presentation to the living on the death of the former rector some years afterwards would have allowed of his doing so with fair comfort), Mr. Evans had, up to the present time, continued by choice to reside in an abode hardly

larger or better, after all improvements to it, than that of the meanest of his parishioners.

The new incumbent of Llanfihangel was, in fact, in many respects a remarkable man. His preferment had taken place at a period highly critical to the well-being of the institution to which he belonged. For nearly a century past the victim of a neglect and scandalous indifference on the part both of bishops and clergy to which we can hardly find a parallel elsewhere, its benefices occupied by Englishmen who could neither enter into the character nor even speak the language of those entrusted to them, or else by a native clergy of the most lax and dissolute description, the Welsh Church had gradually lost the respect and attachment of its laity. The evil had continued to increase until, at the period when Mr. Evans succeeded to his living, the Church was already, in the more populous districts of the Principality, in a fair way to succumb to the new tenets and form of worship which, first originating in the Wesleyan movement in England, had been extended by some seceders from the ranks of the Welsh clergy to the neglected population of their own country. The leaders in this movement were men not without a sturdy honesty and independence of character, and of considerable ability as preachers; and the cause they

had adopted was now advancing with a rapidity which threatened the entire overthrow of the more ancient system. In the large parish of Llanfihangel, indeed, and the rude mountainous tracts which surrounded it, it was several years before the movement which had so profoundly agitated the rest of the Principality made itself in any degree felt. This was partly owing to the remote and secluded character of the district, and partly to the fact that the habits of Mr. Evans's predecessor, although careless and self-indulgent, had not led to those open and scandalous excesses which in too many other places had irrevocably alienated the minds of the parishioners from the Church of their fathers. In many respects, indeed, the late incumbent, a good-tempered, affable, and even kind-hearted man, had been deservedly popular. Hence it happened that at the time of Mr. Evans's nomination to the benefice, and during the greater period of his incumbency (which at the time our tale commences had continued for more than the third of a century), the old order of things had continued at Llanfihangel without any of the interruptions and threatening appearances which in other quarters had become so rife. The chime of its old bells (for the church had, what is not very usual in Wales, a good peal) still week after week collected to its doors the

sturdy peasantry of the neighbourhood, with the peaked beaver hats and neat boddices of their wives and daughters; while from many a remote upland farm or hamlet, to which their sound could not penetrate, the devout inmates, who would on no account have missed a Sunday service, and often started before daybreak for the purpose, trudged sturdily along over moor and dingle, forming themselves into small detached parties, as accident or inclination prompted, and defying alike the asperities of the road and the still more serious impediments of rain or snow; usually arriving at the church-porch, after a walk which in some instances had extended to a distance of no less than nine or ten miles, with quite sufficient time and breath left for an interchange of friendly salutations, and perhaps a sprinkling of the local news of the week, with their fellow-parishioners already congregated on the same spot.

But over and above the causes we have mentioned, this happy exception to the prevailing state of things elsewhere was in great measure due to the energy, the good sense, and self-devotion of Mr. Evans. He was one of those men who, without ever emerging to a conspicuous place in the world's history, have that faculty of being in advance of their time which, where it is called into action on

an important stage, has constituted the real greatness of the leading minds of all ages. From the earliest period of Mr. Evans's employment as a curate in his native parish, and still more during his incumbency, he had set himself actively to work to bring the system which he administered into harmony, as far as was desirable, with the increasing demands of the time and the peculiar temperament and requirements of his own people. Instead of the noble old church being shut up for six days in the week, he now, both by exhortation and his own example, encouraged the rude mountain peasantry, ever more susceptible to the impressions of religion than those in the lowlands, to resort there for short daily services, such as the traveller may hear in the Tyrol or German Switzerland, where morning and evening the villagers, men, women, and children, congregate where their fathers have knelt for centuries before them in lowly worship; or if compelled to proceed to work at a distance, murmur their orisons at the same hour as they thread the tangled pine-forests and dusky vineyards on their path. The service itself, instead of exhibiting merely the touching and solemn, but possibly too intellectual form which is usual in England, was by Mr. Evans's good sense and appreciation of the national character en-

riched with the additions of music and oratory, which are so congenial to the Welsh taste, and which appear in fact to have constituted the principal elements of success with the numerous sects which now overrun that country. Then again the village school, almost unheard of at that period in the majority of Welsh parishes, was in Llanfihangel an institution of the utmost value and efficiency; nearly all the children, even of the more wealthy farmers, received their education there; while its celebrity became so great as to lead to numerous applications for admission from places situate without the borders of the parish. In short, Mr. Evans was a clergyman of a stamp now happily familiar enough in this country, but which at the time of which we write, especially in Wales, hardly existed; one who, feeling no less the responsibility than the power of his supernatural commission, threw himself heart and soul into the work before him, bringing to bear upon it that knowledge of character and sound common sense without which zeal and enthusiasm are too often worse than thrown away. He had accordingly won, in the well-nigh three score years and ten for which he had lived boy and man among his people, not only their cordial love and gratitude, which indeed the kind, simple-hearted old man, with his ever-ready sym-

pathy for old and young, and the more effectual aid which, from his own frugal housekeeping, he was able to extend to all who needed it, could hardly have failed to elicit, but also a degree of respect, we might almost say veneration, which gave him unbounded influence among the unsophisticated parishioners of Llanfihangel.

It was not until quite the later years of Mr. Evans's incumbency that the aspect of affairs in his vicinity assumed a more untoward character. Slowly but surely the new faith had advanced from the more densely-populated parts of the country, in which it had first planted its roots, to the outlying districts and mountain recesses of the principality. Possibly indeed Llanfihangel might have escaped, at least during the lifetime of its present rector, had it not been for a circumstance to which we have adverted in an earlier chapter, the opening of some new slate quarries at the foot of the lake on which the church stood, and the consequently increased communication which took place between the retired vale of the Hirnant and other and more stirring quarters. At first the only result of this was that an itinerant preacher now and then visited the lower valley, holding forth in some cottage or farm-house of the better class, and deriving from his ministrations

such substantial benefits as a supper on the farmer's best "cwrw" and mutton pies, with the occasional addition, from the stores of the farmer's dame, of a cured ham or Vale of Llwyd cheese. At length, in an evil hour, it entered into the mind of Hilkiah Owen, — who had for some year or two past carried on a general business of a highly lucrative nature in the hamlet which, as we have said elsewhere, had sprung up from the resort of the quarrymen to the new works, — that it would redound greatly to the promulgation of the Gospel in those remote parts, as well as to the profitable employment of that Sabbathical or seventh portion of his time which at present, in a commercial point of view, lay as it were fallow and uncultivated, if he should procure the erection within the hamlet of some place of meeting for the Lord's people (who at present, Hilkiah observed, wandered as sheep without a shepherd), and the instalment of himself as chief pastor therein. The proposition was eagerly seconded by the inhabitants of the recently-formed hamlet, who were mostly from a distant part of the country, in which the spread of the new tenets had become almost universal; and subscriptions having been collected to a fair amount, to which the parent society made a considerable addition, the erection of Bethesda Chapel was at once determined on. Now it

had not escaped the penetrating mind of Hilkiah Owen that, while there was little other available building ground in the hamlet, it did happen, that on his own premises, fronting the road, there was a piece of land occupied only by a rickety shed, originally contrived for the location of pigs and other obscene animals, but which was at present untenanted, and well suited for the erection of the projected place of worship. Accordingly, after repeated discussions as to the terms, in the course of which Hilkiah, like Ephron the Hittite, after some feint of parting with the land as a free gift, ended, when it came to practical terms, by extorting a price for it apparently about three times its value, the new building began in earnest; one of those misshapen, unsightly, obtrusive-looking structures, familiar to all tourists in Wales, with two large doors on the lower story, and two windows of still larger dimensions on the one above, from which, on the still summer afternoons, the stentorian voice of the preacher may be heard, like some distant cataract, roaring and rumbling, while the traveller is still half a mile from the locality.

The building advanced apace, and was a source of unfeigned tribulation to the legitimate pastor of Llanfihangel, who, although lenient and considerate

to all who might differ from him, nevertheless had enough of human sensitiveness within him to resent keenly this intrusion on his own authorised functions, and the established order of the Church, of which he was a staunch supporter. He had no remedy, however, but to watch patiently the progress of the new structure, which was in full view from his window, and reflect, as the good old man often did, for what fault or shortcoming of his own this element of evil had been allowed to enter into his hitherto unmolested parish. And thus it came to pass, that on the day on which Harcourt and his fair companions paid their visit to Llanfihangel, from the narration of which we have too long detained the reader, the rival edifice, at Rhos y Gelynion, or the "Foeman's Swamp," as the hamlet was called (not altogether inappropriately Harcourt suggested), from the traditions of some battle or encampment of by-gone times in the marshy field in which it was situated, had already been covered in with the blue slate from the adjacent quarry, and was now undergoing the internal fittings which were necessary to qualify it for its purpose.

As the visitors from Plas Newydd approached Llanfihangel, the afternoon school had just been dismissed. Mr. Evans was in the church, where he had been superintending the practice of the choir,

some of the picked voices from the school, with a few elder lads from the hamlet and lower village, largely reinforced on Sundays and other festival occasions with the deep tenors and basses of the seniors; and he now issued forth to welcome them. He was under the necessity, however, of paying a visit this afternoon to an ailing parishioner in the direction of Plas Newydd, and accordingly proposed to return home with Mrs. Witherby, after a short inspection of the venerable church. The building in question, although at present, from the want of funds for its repair, it was to Mr. Evans's great grief in a somewhat dilapidated state, still presented features far superior to most Welsh structures of its class. It belonged to the Norman style of architecture, and was, in many respects, a highly interesting specimen of that period. Externally a centre tower, of unusual strength and solidity, rose from the intersection of its two transepts; the chancel was stately and well-proportioned, with lancet windows, altered in early times from the narrow round-headed lights which had preceded them; while a highly enriched doorway, under the southern porch, bore evidence to the wealth and skill which had formerly been lavished upon the decorations of the fabric. In the interior, the effect of the architecture was much

spoilt by the obtrusion, in the greater part of the edifice, of huge pews of all shapes and sizes, suggesting the ideas of fortification and military defence rather than those of devotion, as well as by the coats of dingy whitewash, which, for a century or two past, had accumulated on its walls. Still, these drawbacks did not prevent the visitor from admiring the deeply-chiselled arcade-work, (belonging to the "transition period,") which surmounted the altar, the lofty arches of the centre tower or lantern, and above all, the extraordinary massiveness of the pillars which divided the nave from the side aisles, the effect of which was much increased by the depth of the "clerestory" windows above, appearing as if they had been hewn out of the solid rock. The church was new to Harcourt's companions, although not to himself; and they would gladly have devoted a longer time to the examination of its architectural beauties, had it not been for the fear of trespassing upon Mr. Evans's engagements. As it was, after rapidly noticing the different points of which we have spoken, the old clergyman offered Mrs. Witherby his arm, and desiring Harcourt and Lucy to precede them, commenced the walk up the valley. They had not gone far, however, before Mr. Evans called his younger companions back. "Instead of following

the road," he said, "there was a path which ran in the same direction, only keeping on higher ground, and from one point of which there was a delightful view of the church and lake, with part of the lower valley. If Harcourt and Miss Akehurst pursued this, they would be able to rejoin themselves about half-a-mile on, where the path again descended upon the road."

The suggestion was willingly adopted, and Harcourt escorted his fair charge up the path indicated, which mounting rapidly by zigzags on the face of the bank, afterwards ran through some more level sloping meadows parallel to the road they had quitted. To obtain the view of which Mr. Evans had spoken, it was necessary to return for some distance down the valley. This Harcourt accordingly did, until, turning a projecting spur of rock, they emerged upon a point overhanging the lake where the footpath ceased, becoming after this a mere scrambling sheep-track along its margin. The view which met their eyes from this point, although not extensive, amply justified Mr. Evans's praise, offering one of those finished pictures which to the real lover of scenery more than compensate for the absence of a wider range of sight. Immediately at their feet lay the still black water of the lake,

hemmed in on the side on which they stood by precipitous crags, while on the opposite bank a lofty hill of more gradual declivity, and partially wooded, allowed space for the road which wound round its margin. The meagre stone houses of the hamlet at the other end of the lake, with Hilkiah Owen's recent addition to its architecture, were out of sight; but to compensate for this, the old church, with the picturesque cottages of the original village nestling in its shade, formed an important element in the view. Below the hamlet, the course of the Hirnant was visible for about a mile down, the view at that distance being terminated by a bold bluff cliff, the resort of myriads of birds, which stood detached from and in advance of the general line of the hills by which the valley was inclosed, and presented a highly effective feature in the scene. A little to the right of them, of course at much greater distance, appeared the blue summits of the principal mountain chain of the district, while the sun, now rapidly setting behind the height on which our pedestrians stood, and throwing the nearer part of the lake into soft shadow, tinged with a ray of golden lustre the wooded summits on the opposite side, and the modest homesteads and venerable tower of Llanfihangel. As Harcourt and Lucy Akehurst gazed with ad-

miration on a scene of such finished beauty, a boat which they had not previously observed pushed off from behind the projecting headland of rock which they had rounded in attaining their present position. It contained some of the lads (on this occasion joined by two or three of their seniors, who had stolen an hour from work for this purpose) of the rustic but by no means ineffectual choir of Llanfihangel, who mostly came from the lower valley. As the boat emerged round the headland, and the oars fell with a leisurely even plash into the clear water, its occupants, as if in unison with the stillness and peaceful beauty of surrounding objects, united their voices in one of the solemn chants of the Church, with that natural taste and correctness in harmony and time which is almost as universal in Wales as it is among the German populations of the Continent. The boat had touched the opposite shore, and the performers dispersed for their walk homewards, before either Lucy or her companion broke the silence which had succeeded this unexpected addition to the charm of the scene and hour. It was Harcourt who first spoke. "Can anything, Miss Akehurst," he said, "be more exquisite than those voices? there was one of the trebles especially, and a tenor, that fine-looking old man in the stern of the

boat, which would not have disgraced our English cathedrals."

"I hardly think we should have found them there," Lucy answered; "at least, in the only cathedral service I have attended the singing would have seemed poor and feeble by comparison. These men seem to have a natural power and skill in music; their voices are so full and melodious."

"It is so, indeed," replied Harcourt; "and yet it is wonderful how little the Welsh character is appreciated. How few of the English, even of those who come here as tourists, recognise the fact that in these mountain recesses, separated from them by no physical boundary, in many cases inhabiting the upper part of the same valley of which they themselves occupy the lower extremity, dwell a population distinguished from them not only by the obvious differences of race and language, but still more so by the possession of qualities in which they are themselves wholly wanting; enthusiasts in poetry, in music, in oratory; gifted naturally with the power of appreciating and cultivating successfully those acquirements which the more phlegmatic temperament of our Saxon lowlanders pursues, even when educated for the purpose, only with difficulty and reluctance."

"I have seen very little of the Welsh since we resided here," answered Lucy; "and their language is a sealed book to me. I have heard it once or twice in the church here, and thought it sounded very grand and majestic."

"I am very little of a Welsh scholar myself," Harcourt answered; "in fact I can hardly converse in it at all, although I have learnt the meaning and pronunciation of some of the words. I think what I admire most in the language, and what in fact shows the character of the people more than anything else, is their poetical nomenclature for places. In England nothing can be more commonplace than our names; even in the lake districts of Cumberland and Westmoreland, full of beauty as they are, you lose half the effect of the scenery from the meanness of its vocabulary: there is actually a mountain there called 'Robinson!' Even Skiddaw and Helvellyn, although they have a more imposing sound, *express* nothing; at any rate we have lost the clue to their meaning. But in Wales the whole nomenclature is instinct with life; even the tiniest brook and glen possesses a name, either suggestive, like Rhos y Gelynion here, of the legendary history of the country, or else derived from the rich imagination of the bards, which, like the creative genius of the Greeks,

clothed with some beautiful image every feature in the scenery around their homes."

"Old Jenkin told me one day," said Lucy, "that the wretched little hovel on the bank opposite our house, at the mouth of that deep dingle among the trees, is called the Vale of Nightingales; 'Nant Eos,' I think he called it in Welsh."

"Yes," answered Harcourt; "and if you were to take the map, and go through all those long names in it (which I confess would be a formidable undertaking for an English mouth), you would find in the same way that every one of them was descriptive; connected with some long forgotten history or romance, or some picture, fanciful or real, suggested by the place itself. Beddgelert still commemorates the fate and place of sepulture of the faithful hound of Prince Llewelyn; on the table-land of 'Bwrdd Arthur' the heroic chief of Britain feasted with his armed retainers; in the shadowy dale of 'Nant Gwrtheyrn' the bones of the ill-fated Vortigern have reposed for fourteen centuries, under the forked peaks of the Yr Eifl. Every house and homestead is described by some feature of interest in the objects which surround it; the red ridge, the dashing cataract, the gloomy ravine, the confluence of the river, all furnish names to the humble dwellings in

their vicinity, articulating the whole scene with poetry. In the dip of yonder barren moor, 'the Church of the Hollow' nestles in its quiet solitude; of those two cottages in front of us, the one is 'the house of the black torrent;' the other, with the sloping greensward in front, 'the bank of sunshine;' on those blue mountain tops, the farthest we can see from this point, 'the knight of the white lance,' and 'the lady of the white brow,' maintain their airy station, and give its traditional name to their abode."

"I had no idea," said Lucy, who had listened with delight to Harcourt's animated eulogy, "that the Welsh character had so many points of interest; it would tempt one to learn more of them, notwithstanding the difficulty of the language, and I must confess, too, the somewhat unattractive look of the people themselves. I could hardly associate much poetry," said she, laughing, "with old Jenkin's red wig and stolid apathetic features."

"And yet," answered Harcourt, "bring an old harper to Plas Newydd and let him play *Codiad yr Haul*, or the *Men of Harlech*, and you would see Jenkin as wild with enthusiasm as an expatriated Swiss, when he hears the *Ranz des Vaches*. However, the Welsh character has unquestionably two sides. Per-

haps this may be owing to the fact which ethnographers have suspected, that the Welsh are an union of two wholly different races. This shows itself even in their faces, I think; there can hardly be a greater contrast than that which exists between the types of Welsh nationality one often sees, with their shock red hair, stunted forms, and half-cunning half-stolid countenances (I do not mean this to apply to old Jenkin, who is a highly meritorious individual), and the strikingly handsome and regular features and noble expression of such a face, for instance, as that of Mr. Evans. But however this may be, I fear that there is a more important difference, which the upper classes are beginning to feel very much in other parts of the principality, between the old Welsh character of a century or even half a century back, and the degeneration from it which is now almost universal."

"To what is this owing?" asked Lucy.

"The better informed among the Welsh themselves," answered Harcourt, "attribute it almost entirely to the increasing influence of the sectarian preachers: I fear they are too right. It cannot be denied, of course, that there appeared almost a necessity for some external interference to remove evils to which the Church itself seemed unwilling and almost

unable, in the majority of cases, to apply any remedy; neither would any right-judging person deny to those who in the first instance introduced the tenets of the English sectaries into this country, the praise of much zeal and honesty of purpose, however erroneously they may have acted. But after making every allowance of this kind, I fear there is no doubt that it is the introduction of puritanism (which up to the last few years had been wholly unknown in Wales) which has fatally and hopelessly degraded the national character. Psalm-singing, interminable preachings, a canting phraseology, the pretence to higher spiritual gifts, have in fact, and probably by no very remote connection, gone side by side with petty cunning, falsehood, cheating, and immorality of every kind, except drunkenness; thus contrasting with the state of things elsewhere in Great Britain, where the same causes have more frequently resulted in inebriety. I can hardly tell you," added Harcourt, after a slight pause, "how greatly I admire and reverence that noble old man, Mr. Evans. One of the meekest disciples of the Church in his own faith and practice, he is yet as firm as a rock in resisting innovations which he sees to be fraught, not only with doctrinal error, but with the most disastrous consequences to the Welsh cha-

racter. Far from ignoring the necessity of a reform in Church matters, he has seized upon all the points in the new doctrines and forms of worship which have promised any advantage, and has brought them into play in his own parish, where the people all but doat upon him, as well they may do upon one so single-hearted, humble, and devoted. I never seemed to feel, until I knew him, how much *greatness* there is in simple goodness. I wish I could learn, as intending to take orders myself, some other and even higher lessons from one whose whole income, time, and strength, have been from youth to old age consecrated to purposes for which no earthly reward can ever reach him. But I sincerely beg pardon, Miss Akehurst," added Harcourt, turning round abruptly (for his eyes had been for some minutes fixed on the grey tower of Llanfihangel, on which a faint gleam of the setting sunlight still lingered); "I have been preaching you quite a sermon, and I am sure I am the last person in the world who has any title to speak upon such subjects."

As Harcourt turned, his eyes encountered those of Lucy Akehursts, which, sooth to say, were at that moment fixed upon the speaker with a very evident look of admiration and interest. Harcourt was not a vain man, but there was an expression in those fair

orbs (which, as his own gaze met them, were withdrawn in some little confusion), which arrested his thoughts more than anything which would have flattered any mere personal or intellectual conceit. It was the expression of the best gift that woman can bestow until she gives her love,—that of appreciation and sympathy. On Harcourt's enthusiastic temperament (we do not pretend, reader, to make him a model young man, either in good sense or any other quality), the flash of recognition, the mysterious affinity of two congenial souls, fell like an electric spark. The fuel had been ready laid, heaped up, hour by hour, in the silent unsuspecting intercourse of the last few weeks; one glance, stolen at unawares from a maiden's dark eye, applied the torch. Like an impersonation in actual presence of the still evening scene, the musical chant of the rowers, the golden light of the fervid sunset, the warm emotions and solemn musings of his own heart, rose, as if it had been a spirit, from the gleaming waters at his feet, and stood before him in her young loveliness, in her grace of form, her bright smile, her matchless womanhood, her power of knowing and understanding *him*, the angel, the fair creation of his dream; that which, however ineffectually and sadly, he must henceforth worship, must *love*. Tremulously, dizzily, almost in

silence, his heart and brain well nigh reeling with the consciousness of new and absorbing sensations, Harcourt escorted his companion from the banks of the lake, now fast sinking into shadow, and pursuing the path indicated by the clergyman, rejoined him with Mrs. Witherby not far below Plas Newydd, the topics they had been discussing having occupied them longer than either had supposed.

CHAP. IV.

"To love! it is to have a *two-fold* being :
One, Nature's handmaid, sentient, hearing, seeing ;
The pale drudge ministering in men's view
To all the weary forms we speak and do :
And one, the music of an angel's mirth,
A gleam from heaven, a hidden thing on earth;"—

R. LARGE.

As Lucy Akehurst retired to rest that night, while she thought over with much pleasure the occurrences of the day, she yet experienced a little uneasiness from what she had observed in Harcourt's manner that evening. To Aunt Witherby he was as full of kindness and attention as ever; but to herself he had appeared, for the first time on one or two occasions during the evening, distant and reserved; and Lucy almost feared she must have done something to offend him. However, she trusted that the cloud, whatever it was, would disperse by next day, and once more recalling with pleasure the interesting and animated conversation in which she had shared, and the beauty and varied powers of the mind with which she had, by such a singular accident, been brought

into contact in this wild locality, Lucy fell happily asleep. Not so Edgar Harcourt. Hour after hour found him tossing on his couch, until the first blush of day once more began to tinge the dark oak paneling and heavy draperies of his apartment. Whirling incessantly through his thoughts in every confusion of idea, now inspiring hope, now despair; at one moment urging him to quit an abode fraught with so much danger, at another suggesting a hundred excuses for remaining there; now presenting itself in the guise of the far-descended daughter of Cheveleigh, one to whose hand, even were she less lovely in every attribute, it would be incredible folly and presumption on his part to aspire; now appearing as the interested and admiring listener to his rhapsodies on the craggy margin of the lake; alternately unapproachable in its excellence and resistless in its attraction, rose before Harcourt's mind perpetually that one idea, the reflection of that fair prototype, Lucy Akehurst. The floodgates were opened, and the tide of love, with all its conflicting anxieties and emotions, contemned and slighted until its power was known, now rushed in irresistibly, and poured in a full torrent through the hitherto guarded channels.

Ten days of exquisite weather, bringing the month

of May to a close, succeeded the expedition to Llan-fihangel. The sunshine was unclouded, the air delicious; brightness, beauty, and melody were in every sight and sound of nature. It was impossible to stop in-doors; and Harcourt, who still lingered on at Plas Newydd, resolving that every day should be the last, and yet finding it each morning more impossible to tear himself away, eagerly seconded Mrs. Witherby's proposal of achieving some mountain excursions to points of interest in the neighbourhood, with most of which he was indeed familiar. Lucy had very soon discovered that Harcourt was not *offended*; there was evidently no ground for apprehending that; still, she certainly was puzzled to understand why it was that their visitor, although usually as animated and eloquent, or perhaps it would be more correct to say, ten times as animated and eloquent as ever, occasionally and most unaccountably relapsed into fits of abstraction, during which he would walk silently, with downcast eyes, by her side, and then as unexpectedly resume his former manner. However, this drawback, if such it were, by no means affected Lucy's thorough enjoyment of these halcyon ten days. If she had marvelled before at her own want of appreciation in considering Plas Newydd dull or monotonous, she

did so now a hundred times more. The river murmured by pleasantly, the sun looked in brightly at the old mullioned windows, the flowers bloomed, and the birds chirped round the house all day long; Harcourt was there, with his perpetual fund of interesting and lively conversation; the light of summer, the freshness of young life was in everything. Then again, nothing could be more delightful than the mountain excursions, which, under Harcourt's escort, and with Mrs. Witherby as *chaperon* (indeed, as we have said, that worthy lady generally instigated them), came off almost daily. Every expedition seemed to open up some new source of beauty and interest in itself, some fresh topic of animated discussion to beguile the way. When the distance was too great for Lucy to accomplish on foot, she generally enlisted the services of the pony we have mentioned, old Taffy, a sagacious quadruped, who was kept by Jenkin (a kind of half bailiff, half indoor-servant on the premises) to assist him in fetching peat, water, provisions, or other domestic necessities, and who usually contrived to earn his daily allowance of provender with as little outlay of exertion on his part as his employer for the time being would tolerate. However, Taffy, who was popularly believed to be about thirty

years old, could be made to work when it was peremptorily insisted upon; and, probably, Lucy had never enjoyed a canter on her Arabian filly at Cheveleigh more than she did the plodding pace of the old Welsh pony up the steep banks and across the moors of his native district. Harcourt's previous knowledge of the country was of great service on these occasions, as he was not only able to act as guide, but also to communicate to his companions various interesting legends and anecdotes connected with the different localities which formed the object of the day's excursion. Thus they visited together the gloomy defile and sullen-looking pool of Llyn Delyn, "the Harp Lake," and listened to the romantic tale from which it derives its name. "Here," Harcourt told them, "in former times stood the fortalice of an ancient chieftain, a bold bad man, reckless alike of human and divine laws, whose rapine and extortion made him the terror of the neighbourhood, while his boon companions at the castle pursued an unceasing round of riot and debauchery.

"It was one morning, early on Easter Sunday. The bells of Llangorwen, or the Church of the White Choir, which had been endowed by the ancestors of Lord Morven, as the chieftain was called, chimed

merrily over hill and dale in honour of the dawn of the Resurrection. But their summons was unheeded at the castle. Lord Morven and his retainers had watched indeed all the Easter Eve, but it was over the dice and wine-cup; when morning came their haggard and jaded countenances showed how the night had been spent. Some of the party would now have retired to rest, but Lord Morven insisted that the revel should go on. It was suggested that it was Easter Sunday, but he laughed loud and scornfully; 'the better the day, the better the deed,' he said, and ordered the flagons to be filled anew, and the remains of the last night's banquet to be replaced upon the tables. Now, too, Lord Morven missed the family harper, and desired him to be summoned forthwith, that he might make music to the guests as they ate and drank. The old man came with trembling and reluctant steps; he had stolen away from the hall the evening before, as the revel grew fast and furious, to make his Easter shrift, and he now longed to join the faithful who crowded to the matins at that early hour within the church walls. But his lord's order was peremptory, and he was forced to obey. His hand wandered confusedly over the strings at first, and he seemed incapable of producing any modulation; but,

frightened at Lord Morven's threatening aspect, as he waited for the music, the old harper at length commenced one of his festive strains. But it was in vain; involuntarily the melody assumed another character in his hands, and the sounds died away into a melancholy wailing dirge. Another and another air were tried with the same result. Then Lord Morven suddenly rose from table, and smote his hands together, 'What is this, my boon comrade?' he cried, 'what nameless terror is upon you? — every man's face and form seems wrapt in darkness; the hall and doorways are full of shadows, following each other under the earth into obscure darkness; all is gloom and black night around. Come forth abroad, and we will finish our revel under the castle walls; there will be no ghosts and dismal apparitions there.' Then the guests laughed, with that forced, unnaturally loud laugh which is so terrible to hear, as if the lips that uttered it were not the laugher's own; and rising hastily, they followed their chief to the archers' practising ground in front of the castle. There was no interruption now to the mirth of the banquet, which continued with increased ardour as the sun clomb high in the heavens; the dice rattled on the tables, the wine-flagon passed briskly from hand to hand. The old harper had

hoped to escape now, but his master detained him, and from time to time called for fresh music. The shadows from the hills grew shorter, and the sun climbed higher and higher, until it was full noon. Then, in obedience to Lord Morven's order, the harper again lifted his instrument, and commenced the required strain. He had hardly done so, when a large bird of an unknown species suddenly descended from some eminence near, and carried off the old man's cap in his beak. Hastily placing his harp on the ground, the musician started in chase of the bird. His most active exertions, however, proved ineffectual to overtake the depredator. From tree to tree, then out upon the open moor, over crag and dell the bird flew, still keeping in sight, but never allowing his pursuer to approach him. At length, just when the old man was wearied with the chase, and about to abandon it in despair, the bird dropped his cap upon a rock close at hand, and flapping his wings, flew away into the clear sky. The harper now bent his steps homeward. He was surprised to find how many miles he had been carried in the pursuit; as he approached the familiar landmarks which surrounded the castle, and which had in fact served to guide his steps back, the sun was already setting, and the shadows from the hills now lay long and

dark upon the ground. But the old man's surprise was soon increased tenfold. As he crossed the brow of a rising ground, from which the castle was usually full in sight, he was amazed to see that its grey turrets and battlements no longer rose in their accustomed place; the other familiar objects of the scene were all as he had left them, but the castle, with its festal and joyous throng, had disappeared. In its place, wrapping the unburied dead in its mantle of dark waters, lay a black, sullen-looking lake, on the top of which floated the old man's harp, while at an immeasurable depth beneath he fancied he could distinguish (at any rate they have never been seen since) the towers of the engulphed fortress. No other vestige of the fate of Lord Morven and his guests ever came to light. The harper wandered forth in quest of another home, and often in the winter evenings at the fireside recounted with trembling lips the story of his own mysterious escape, and the fearful origin of 'Llyn Delyn.'"

Another day's expedition took Harcourt and his companions to the lovely vale in which St. Melangell, the fair recluse of this remote solitude, protected the fugitive hare from the rude huntsmen of the vicinity, and has ever since (although we know not what railroad innovation may have done) continued the

tutelage of the species, who are known as "St. Melangell's (or Monocella's) lambs," and enjoy an immunity from their oppressors under the shadow of the humble shrine dedicated to her memory. In an opposite direction they explored the retreat of St. Tydecho, worn by the footsteps of numerous pilgrims, where the stony bed of the Saint, and even the cruciform print of his fingers in the hard rock, are still shown to the tourists who in modern times have supplied their place. In a similar excursion they crossed the main chain of the moorlands which surrounded them, feasting upon the rare and delicate fruit of the cloudberry, which is almost peculiar to this district, and achieved the laborious ascent of the mountain summit tenanted, as Harcourt had already informed Lucy, by the "knight of the white lance;" while a further day's ride placed them beneath the gloomy chasm of the Pistill Rhaiadr, now from the long drought almost denuded of its principal feature, the dashing torrent which here descends in one long leap from the precipices of the Berwyn chain; although still imposing from its height and the sterility of the surrounding scene.

It was a striking, and yet perhaps a mournful spectacle too, the enjoyment of those young unsophisticated hearts, as they thus dived into the craggy re-

cesses and fastnesses of the mountains, with that sense of the beauty stamped so lavishly on even the commonest objects which met their gaze, which is the rare privilege of those on whom the corroding influences of life have not yet passed. Occasionally Mrs. Witherby would insist on her companions pursuing some unexplored track or attractive-looking dingle without her, promising to rejoin them at a point nearer home. Fatal indeed were these solitary rambles to Harcourt's peace of mind. With an intuitive conviction of his own imprudence, he could not forego the enjoyment of such companionship; and many a sleepless hour, in the following night, paid for the thrilling transport of a touch from Lucy's soft hand, as he assisted her over some obstacle in their path, or the glance at that exquisitely fair face, glowing with health and exercise, and rewarding his animated descriptions of the various objects on their route, with a bright look of interest and appreciation. Very fatal too to Harcourt's repose after these expeditions, and indeed at all other times, was the low musical laugh, peculiarly Lucy's own, with which she responded to some passing jest or humorous sally of her companion. It sounded to him, he thought, like the voice of the agate brooks, murmuring forth their happiness to the sun, as he gazed down into their clear

depths. Alas! poor Harcourt! Notwithstanding his protestations, he would have given all the lakes and mountains in the universe *now*, for one echo of that laugh, or one glance at that fair face.

And now, perchance, the reader may propound some enquiries touching the nature of Lucy's own feelings. We must firmly but respectfully decline to furnish any explicit answer. We will only say that it is happy, indeed, for those whose existence without them would be a dark and dejected succession of toil and weariness, that nature has implanted in these gentle hearts a yearning for the support and strength of a firmer arm; an ivy-like clinging to some object round which it may twine and spend itself in love and tenderness; an angelic and compassionate charity, rating, far beyond their value, the small qualities of good which here and there appear among the dross; else might our ruder sex pine in vain for the attachment of natures which appear framed in a mould of more refinement, and endowed with loftier aspirations. But, however this may be (and perhaps it *was* a somewhat ominous symptom that Lucy, although enjoying to the utmost these excursions, began to discover in herself, at times, a nervous timidity as to being much alone with Harcourt, and a tendency to find some

employment in the opposite direction, of which she had been wholly unconscious in the earlier days of their acquaintance), however this may be, it is certain that Harcourt, passionately as he loved, never, in his moments of serious reflection, ever dreamed of the possibility of success. That he *did* love, with all the enthusiasm of his ardent soul, he could not of course disguise from himself; on the contrary, his only surprise now was that he should have been half-an-hour in Lucy's society without such a result taking place; and feeling this, Harcourt at the same time felt that it was impossible for him much longer to support the suspense of his present state, and that, happen what might, he *must*, ere long, utter the words which would finally determine his fate. That the reply could by any possibility be favourable, he never allowed himself to hope. Harcourt had gathered from Lucy her real position, as far as she herself knew it (for by Butler's advice no intimation had been given her of the actual position of her affairs under the settlement); and he had heard enough to make him see, that notwithstanding the retirement in which her mother, either from temporary embarrassment or some other unexplained cause, was at present living, her real position, as the owner of Cheveleigh, was one which would make

any pretensions to her daughter's hand, from one who had his own way to make, highly unacceptable. But even independently of these considerations, Harcourt's day-dream was too bright and beautiful for him ever to anticipate success with its object, so fair, so far removed, as she appeared to him, from the imperfect homage it was in his power to offer : to lift his eyes so high, with any expectation of a favourable result, appeared to him intolerable presumption. He was resolved to hear his sentence ; the interval of suspense was insupportable ; but like a criminal, he was prepared to bow his neck under the decree, and carry through life the heavy burden of his exile from the heart in which he felt, had its attainment been less impossible, he might have known boundless happiness and love.

CHAP. V.

"Hushed to a deep stillness, which the pulse's audible throbbing
Made animate ; which holy fervour and eager devotion
Made dearer to the King of Spirits, than festival anthems
Pealed in choral worship to the tide-like murmuring organ."

ELDRIDGE.

THE last day of the month happened to be a Sunday, and as there was to be no service at Plas Newydd, both Lucy and Mrs. Witherby were induced, by the description Harcourt had given of the grandeur and sonorous beauty of the Welsh Liturgy, when properly performed, to attend the morning church at Llanfihangel. Mr. Evans officiated as usual, and the ladies were delighted with the service, which in the deep tones and forcible enunciation of the reader (whose voice had lost nothing by the advance of years), fully justified Harcourt's praise. One great feature of the services, however, as Harcourt had been accustomed to hear them at Llanfihangel, was on this day absent, much to his disappointment; and that was the choir. A few of the school children, who had been selected as trebles,

at first endeavoured to sustain their usual part in the chants and responses; but the attempt was so unsuccessful, and the absence of the principal voices made the performance so blank and unsatisfactory, that by Mr. Evans's desire they desisted, and the service proceeded to its close without singing of any kind. Nor was this the only unusual circumstance. Although, as we have said, the old man's voice was as clear and firm as ever, Harcourt yet fancied he detected in his countenance an air of uneasiness and vexation. At the same time he observed in the deeply-marked expressive faces of the men, which peered over the huge pews and under the massive arches of the nave, as if they had been themselves chiselled from the same solid blocks as the corbels over their heads, as well as in an unmistakeable flutter, and occasional whispered snatches of conversation, when any pause in the service took place, between their helpmates of the gentler sex, an indication that something uncommon was a-foot. The sermon, indeed, was delivered by Mr. Evans, whose advanced age appeared nowhere less than in his clerical functions, with an earnestness which seemed to rivet the faculties of his hearers. But Harcourt, who had the excuse of hardly understanding a syllable, could not prevent his attention being at

times distracted by a distant but gradually increasing sound, which appeared to be approaching the church from the outside. The nature of this was at first uncertain; but as the discourse reached its close, it evidently assumed the character of some performance in psalmody, sustained by numerous voices, but of a peculiarly dolorous and sombre character. To explain the cause of this interruption, we must apprise the reader of some circumstances which had occurred in the quiet village of Llan-fihangel, since the period of Harcourt and Lucy's last visit there. In this interval, the meeting-house for the faithful, aided no less by the fine weather and long working days, than by the pious energy of its intended pastor Hilkiah Owen, had been completed in all essentials, and was ready for the reception of those who were to occupy its walls. After sundry conferences, it had been arranged that the public opening of the building should be fixed for the last Sunday in the month. The proceedings on this occasion, after the extempore prayer and psalmody which would be appropriate to the solemn occasion of Hilkiah's call to his new labours, were to consist of a series of three consecutive sermons by different preachers; the first and third in Welsh, by native talent; and the intermediate one, by a


stranger of great repute from Manchester, and in English, of which the Welsh chapel-goers, even when they cannot understand two sentences together, always appear to speak as a distinguished spiritual privilege; we have even heard this inducement to a full attendance at meeting advertised over night by the town crier. Now, in the natural elation of his heart, Hilkiah had directed all his energies to achieving two points in the day's celebration, which he rightly conjectured would add greatly to its *éclat*. One of these was the interception of the Llanfihangel choir (who, as we have said, mostly came from the lower valley), on their way to their functions at the church, and the diversion of their powers to the use of his own chapel. The other was the formation of a procession after the morning service, which should proceed along the shores of the lake to the older village, and return by the same route; having thus displayed the triumph of the new faith to the inhabitants of the upper part of the valley, who were much less favourably affected towards it than those lower down, and, as it were, broken ground in the field which hereafter might become fitted for its reception. Hilkiah was gratified in both particulars. The choral performers, seduced partly by the novelty, and the

earnest persuasions and, in some instances, bribes of Hilkiah; and partly by the anticipations of a tea-drinking in the chapel which was to close the day's proceedings, almost to a man deserted their allegiance, although they still retained sufficient reverence for the ancient worship to decline joining the procession in its march to Llanfihangel: and Hilkiah found it a matter of discretion not to press this point. The arrangements for the procession in other respects were effected entirely according to his wishes. Hence it happened, that just as the congregation of Llanfihangel were descending the well-worn flight of steps which led up to the churchyard, and preparing for their walk homeward, the professors of the new faith, headed by Hilkiah Owen and his three coadjutors, after following the road by the lake side, emerged round a projecting spur of rock upon the same spot, walking two and two, with an extremely demure expression of countenance; and uplifting one of those interminable pieces of psalmody, apparently constructed without any reference to time or tune, and calculated to last, if desired, till doomsday, which the traveller may so often hear issuing from the doors of the Welsh meeting-houses, and which irresistibly suggest to the mind the homely but vivid image of the tune "of which the old cow died." This buphonic

performance was of course what had greeted Harcourt's ears in the distance; in fact, from the curvature of the lake, it had been generally audible for some considerable period before those engaged in it themselves appeared. When they did so, things began to assume an aspect rather serious. The road underneath the churchyard wall was very narrow, hemmed in by the river on the opposite side, and wholly incapable of accommodating the two human streams which now so inopportunately poured into it at the same moment, and neither of which showed the least indication of giving way. To do Hilkiah justice, he had not premeditated this part of the day's occurrences. Although willing enough that the adherents of the ancient worship should have the mortification, while engaged in their own devotional exercises, of hearing the triumphant strains which indicated the progress of tenets of an opposite description, Hilkiah had nevertheless (perhaps with some personal considerations, for he was naturally timorous, and the sturdy mountaineers of the upper valley were a choleric race) calculated that the procession would have returned to Rhos y Gelynyon before the vicar's sermon had concluded; and his calculation was only defeated by the omission of the singing, which brought the service to a close much before its usual time. As it was, Hil-

kiah evinced considerable dismay at the collision which seemed inevitable. His own party, indeed, although numerically smaller than the other side, had probably the advantage in physical strength, as they were mostly composed of men, and included the whole body of labourers from the quarries — active, robust fellows, who were well paid, and lived high in proportion. Still Hilkiah was in the van of battle, and he now bitterly repented of the vain-glorious display which had brought him into a position of so much peril. It is true, he had now dubbed himself “Reverend:” still, he was well aware that the old-fashioned mountaineers, one or two of whom now confronted him with no very flattering expression in their countenances, would be little disposed, in a general *mêlée*, to attach much inviolability to his person. In fact, his nearest opponent, an honest farmer from the Berwyns, was already beginning to twitch the stout sapling which had assisted his descent from those elevated regions, with evident indications of a desire that it should fulfil the more noble purposes of its existence, by being brought to impinge, there and then, upon anybody’s skull who might happen to be within its reach. At this crisis, however, the tall erect figure of the incumbent of Llanfihangel appeared upon the scene of action. Mr. Evans, al-

though aware of the intended procession, and perhaps anticipating some unpleasantness in consequence, had been less quick than Harcourt in hearing the lugubrious strains which attended the march of the chapel-party. On emerging from the vestry, where he had been accidentally detained for a few minutes, he became aware for the first time of the untoward *rencontre* which had taken place, and now hastened forward to prevent the results which appeared likely to ensue upon it. A disgraceful outrage interrupted the execution of this purpose. As Mr. Evans bent forward over the churchyard wall where he stood, with the view of summoning one or two of his leading parishioners to give their assistance in restraining any outbreak, a stone, flung by some miscreant in the rear of the crowd, struck him nearly under the left temple. The blow was one of some violence; and for a minute or two Mr. Evans leant, dizzy and stunned, against the stone coping of the wall, while a stream of blood trickled down through the old man's fingers which were pressed to his temple, and stained the thin grey hair underneath. The author of the injury was easily discovered; a loutish-looking youth, of about eighteen or nineteen, one of the labourers from the quarries, who had perhaps thrown the missile without much consideration of the



consequences, and now stood looking sheepishly round, with some uncertainty as to whether he should receive applause or censure for the exploit. As soon as the offender became apparent, Harcourt, with several other members of the Llanfihangel congregation who had witnessed the act, sprang forward to bring him to condign justice ; but their purpose was anticipated. A lad, whom Harcourt had on one or two previous occasions observed at the parsonage, and who was now standing with the school children behind Mr. Evans, darted impetuously forward, and leaping the low wall of the churchyard, dealt the culprit a blow which sent him reeling against the stump of a tree which overhung the stream of the Hirnant ; and collaring his adversary, before he had recovered from this assault, dragged him to the edge of the water, with the apparent intention of cooling his ardour by an immersion in the limpid element. In this he probably would have succeeded ; for although slightly made, and much younger than his opponent, the lad showed, when thus called into action, a strength of muscle and limb wholly disproportioned to his size ; while the bystanders of both parties either remained silent, or loudly applauded such an act of justice. Meanwhile, however, Mr. Evans had recovered from the first effects of the blow he had under-

gone. Seeing what was going on, he exclaimed, in a tone of unusual sternness, "What is this, Philip? have you so soon forgotten the past, and your own resolutions? Loose your hold of him instantly!" The lad obeyed, and returning to the churchyard with a deep tinge upon his brown cheek, glided with a quick step through the crowd, and resumed his former position behind Mr. Evans. The latter then turned to those of his own parishioners who were most in advance, and assuring them that he was not hurt, entreated them, if they valued his request, to desist from any reprisals, and remain for the present within the enclosure of the churchyard, allowing the procession to pursue its course unmolested.

The Methodists, however, appeared to have no intention of continuing this part of their proceedings. The unmanly outrage which had been perpetrated, had caused a proportionate revulsion of feeling in the mixed assemblage who were now grouped on the outside of the churchyard. The great bulk of these indeed consisted of parishioners from the lower valley, who had on this day for the first time, and not without uneasiness on the part of some of their number, deserted their accustomed place of worship in order to be present at the opening of the new chapel. On the other hand, the indi-

cations of this altered state of things were not lost on their auxiliaries the quarrymen, who possibly somewhat ashamed of the act perpetrated by their party, and not without apprehensions as to the result if the inhabitants of the two valleys, who together greatly outnumbered them, and by whom they were usually regarded with no small jealousy, should combine in any active measures of retaliation, now slunk away by twos and threes on the road homeward. In this retrograde movement they were preceded by Hilkiah Owen, who on the first blow being struck had, with a precipitation very unbecoming his dignity as chief pastor, retreated to the rear of the engagement, carrying with him his three colleagues, and overturning in his haste one or two of the smaller fry of the chapel, who had united their youthful persons and voices to the procession. Being thus left to themselves, the rest of those who had joined in it, now considerably abashed at their late secession, either mingled silently with the older members of the orthodox congregation, who during the affray had lingered under the church porch (where Lucy and Mrs. Witherby had also retired for security), or else crowded round the incumbent, adding their sympathy and offers of service to those

which already were poured upon him from all quarters.

Mr. Evans replied with a kind smile to the attentions of those by whom he was thus encircled. "Thank you, my friends," he said, "for your kindness and goodness to an old man. I wish I were more worthy of the love you have ever shown my poor self. As to the cut, it is nothing serious, and I have no doubt it will soon be put to rights at home. My children," added the old man, after a pause, observing that his auditors still lingered, as if expecting to hear something from him on the occurrences of the day; "I would fain say a few words, in simple truth and kindness, to those among you who have not been with us at this morning's service. I know that in going elsewhere, in attending the ministrations of those who have neither authority nor commission to preach God's word or tend his people, ye have acted in ignorance and thoughtlessness, following too hastily these new lights, who profess greater spiritual gifts and higher privileges than their neighbours. But, notwithstanding this, I should fail in my duty towards you if I did not warn you solemnly, my children, that in thus doing ye sin grievously before the Almighty, rending asunder His body, which is and can be but *one*; and following fa-

bles of man's devising, and self-chosen paths of error, instead of His blessed and eternal truth. My children, I speak not this for my own sake, as though I feared the loss of any worldly profit or honour by the spread of these new doctrines; nay, ye yourselves know, among whom I have lived, boy and man, these threescore and ten years, that I set little store by such things. It is for your own individual sakes,—knowing the account which each one of us must give hereafter of his own acts, his following or departure from the truth,—that I speak to you plainly upon this matter; not as lording it over you, but as my most dear friends and neighbours. Men talk, indeed, now-a-days, as if the Church were some human institution, something requiring to be popular; to win temporal support and favour, and maintain its stability by following the passing notions and humours of the times. But you and I know better, my friends. We know that the Church is of God's own planting; and that however numerous they may be whom He permits, for His own purposes, to fall away from it; if there were but one family, as there was of old, left alive on earth who continued within its pale; it would still be His, the temple of His eternal presence, unchanged and indestructible. As regards our own branch of the Church Catholic, my friends, our fa-

thers received it centuries ago, now nearly 1800 years, from the hands of its first propagators—some say from the blessed apostle St. Paul himself. Our nation dwelt then in the rich and level plains of England: when they were driven by foreign invasion to these mountain fastnesses, they carried with them the sacred deposit they had thus received, and planted it here, literally on a rock. Since that time, bitter persecution and peril have swept over this our Church and its sister Church of England, now happily united with it. Especially in the Great Rebellion, nearly two centuries ago, the English and Scotch Puritans, having butchered their sovereign and subverted the ancient order in Church and State, penetrated even to this remote corner of the island, and, for a time, suppressed the exercise of Christian worship which had so long been happily maintained here. And some revival of this Puritan spirit appears to be taking place in these times, even as ye have seen on this very day, when sectaries of all kinds, encouraged too often by persons calling themselves members of the Church, instead of labouring humbly and patiently, each in his own station, for the removal of abuses,—of which, alas! we see but too many instances around us,—aim at the entire demolition of God's house and temple, hoping to build up in its stead the

fanciful conceits and unstable theories of their own devising. But, my friends, we may let them do their worst; only let us keep our own souls from being seduced into their errors, and we need not fear their utmost violence for Christ's Church. Without *His* permission they cannot displace one altar from the spot where He hath planted it, or even lift a finger for its overthrow. The endowments, indeed, of the Establishment, as it is called, the rich gifts of pious kings and nobles in old times, they *may* spoil and pillage at their will,—would to Heaven they had them all, if *that* is what they seek!—but the living, imperishable Church itself, that which apostles planted and martyrs watered with their blood, will defy all their assaults, whether in subtlety or violence, as it has done for now eighteen centuries: it cannot be shaken, for the presence of God is within it; it is built on the rock of the Eternal Word, and 'the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.'

"My children, you must pardon an old man's garrulity. Something tells me that my own time among you will not now be much longer; and if my voice should not again be heard in this place, I would fain that its last words should be those of blessing and goodwill towards you and all men, as, Heaven knows, my heart is wholly without evil intent towards any.

Only, my friends, of *one* thing I am quite sure;—that when you and I are laid in our quiet graves, there will still, by God's mercy, survive among us, unchanged as the everlasting hills under which our bones shall then moulder, unbroken by the worst malice of its enemies, the Church in which our forefathers lived and died before us, and in which I heartily pray we and our children may do so likewise."

There was something in the words and appearance of the old man as he delivered this brief, but touching and solemn address, his thin erect figure seeming to gain height as he spoke, and his grey hair, from which he had removed the covering when he pronounced the Divine name, still showing the traces of blood, as a light air stirred it from time to time, which, coupled with their almost hereditary love and veneration for the speaker, produced a marked sensation in the various groups who now almost filled the churchyard, and led to one of those enthusiastic expressions of Welsh character which, if rightly directed, might be productive of the happiest and noblest results. As the incumbent gently turned away from those by whom he had been surrounded, an almost spontaneous cry rose to their lips, "Father, your blessing." At the same moment, by a general impulse, the men's hats were taken from their heads,

and the whole of those present bowed their knees to the ground in the attitude of prayer. Mr. Evans's heart was full: kneeling down, very simply and unaffectedly, by the side of his people, he recited one of the collects from the Liturgy which petitions for unity of doctrine in the Church, and then rising pronounced the solemn benediction which concludes the Eucharistic office.

The scene in the churchyard of Llanfihangel was not easily forgotten by those who witnessed it, and the recollection of it, together with the interest which attached to the presentiment as to his own approaching removal expressed in Mr. Evans's closing words (too soon, alas, verified by the occurrences to which we shall allude in a subsequent chapter), long afterwards retained in their allegiance to the ancient faith many waverers who might otherwise have been seduced from its pale. Alas! that such efforts can only interpose a temporary check to the advance of evil, like that which some stalwart rock may present to the insidious but sure approaches of the rising tide.

It was not long since that we revisited Llanfihangel, which we had first seen many years previously, while accident had prevented our hearing any par-

ticulars of its history in the meanwhile. Following what is now a good macadamised road along the lower valley, we reached what we recollected, and have described in the preceding pages, as the hamlet of Rhos y Gelynion, but which at the present date, although as dingy and squalid as ever, exhibits an aggregation of houses which almost entitles it to the appellation of a town. Hilkiah Owen no longer ministers to the temporal and spiritual necessities of the inhabitants; but his shop is still there, decorated with handsome plate glass windows, and, as far as outward appearances go, decidedly in advance of the numerous competitors for public favour who have sprung up in its vicinity. Bethesda Chapel has been less fortunate. It still, indeed, survives on the site of the *ci-devant* piggeries; but it has, for some years apparently, encountered two formidable rivals in a "New Jerusalem" and "Primitive Methodist" chapel, which have been erected, nearly side by side, in front of the original resort of the faithful; while, still more recently, all three have been eclipsed, both in size and decoration, by, we believe, a Baptist meeting-house, from the ample vomitories of which, at the time of our visit, a congregation of highly respectable dimensions was pouring forth into the main street of Rhos y Gelynion.

Wearied with the architectural varieties of the dingy village, and the clamorous importunity of its urchin beggars, most of them the children of labourers far above want, but who (by another innovation on the genuine Welsh character, and much to the grief of those who can remember its better days) dog the heels of the stranger in every direction, petitioning for pence and half-pence, we directed our steps towards Llanfihangel, with the intention of reviving our recollections of its interesting localities. The first unpleasant surprise that awaited us was the alteration which had taken place in the scene, formerly one of great beauty, which was presented to the traveller as he emerged from Rhos y Gely-nion, and pursued the road we have more than once mentioned by the side of the small but exquisitely-proportioned lake. The slate quarries have now been worked along the whole of the bank opposite the road, piercing deep into the heart of the mountain, and disfiguring the valley in every direction with the scarred rock of the workings, and the masses of rubbish from the blasting of the slates, whose accumulation in fact now threatens to block up the lake itself, whose dimensions it has already greatly contracted. Arrived at Llanfihangel, which we were somewhat comforted to find had been protected

from innovation by the superior attractions of the modern village, we repaired at once to the noble old church. Alas ! it existed only as a ruin. The clerk, a middle-aged hale man in Mr. Evans's time, but now fast declining in years, detailed to us the circumstances which had led to this result. Shortly after Mr. Evans's death, some ominous indications of a settlement had shown themselves in the south wall of the chancel. Immediate repairs were necessary, but it had been found impossible to levy a rate for the purpose. At length a fissure, which rent the wall from top to bottom, immediately under the tower, alarmed the parishioners into active measures, and a strong buttress was run up as a support to the tower and chancel. But it was too late. The task was hardly completed when one Sunday afternoon, just as the bells were beginning to chime for the service, the easternmost portion of the church fell with a loud crash, followed a few days later by the tower and part of the nave. Two or three arches of the latter still remain, which have been covered in, and rudely fitted up for the now scanty congregation ; — the space is only over large for the purpose.

We turned away mournfully from a scene which typified to the mind the mutability of earthly things, and the spread of innovation and change among

scenes which appeared the most remote from their influence ; suggesting, perhaps, at the same time, the fatal results of long protracted neglect, and the inability, when its consequences have reached a certain point, of even the most vigorous efforts and devotion to restore the falling fabric. We hold, indeed, with the worthy pastor of Llanfihangel, that the Church Catholic, the witness of the truth and inheritor of immortal gifts, is, and ever must be, itself imperishable. But its branches, from human culpability and wilfulness, may wither and decay on one shore, while the root strikes firm and deep hold, and flourishes in renovated vigour, on another.

CHAP. VI.

"Spirit of deep love waking
In a spotless maiden soul;"—

RAYMOND.

ON the morning following the occurrences at Llanfihangel which we have described in the preceding chapter, Harcourt, whether stimulated to a more vigorous exertion of self-control from the associations of the previous day, or from whatever other cause, entered into a firm resolution to escape from the society in which, delightful as it was, he began to feel strong suspicions it was neither prudent, nor perhaps altogether honourable, for him to continue. He determined, indeed, to ascertain his fate in the quarter where all his thoughts and desires now hourly centred, before he left; but, as we have said, he never for a moment allowed himself to cherish any hopes of a favourable result; and, as further delay would only increase the wretchedness of a final separation, he determined that no solicitations, either from his own inclination or the entreaties of his kind hosts, should induce him to prolong his visit

beyond at most a few days longer. This resolution, Harcourt, much to his credit, carried into effect with unflinching vigour and determination. After an almost serious altercation with Mrs. Witherby, in which that good lady, in frightfully bad Welsh, detailed the names of at least some twenty places within walking distance, which Mr. Evans, or other informants, had suggested as deserving of a visit, Harcourt eventually entered into a compromise for his quitting Plas Newydd on the Monday following, thus leaving him a week's longer visit there ; a period which Mrs. Witherby (in consideration of his departure having been deferred from Thursday, which he had at first named, to the Monday in question) stipulated in express terms that she would not attempt to enlarge.

When Lucy Akehurst retired to rest that evening, the warm summer air stealing in through the creepers which half covered the latticed casement of her apartment, it would be useless to conceal from the reader that she experienced an emotion which had never hitherto visited that fair breast. With a disingenuity and self-deceit not at all unusual in the affairs of love, she had hitherto avoided any direct questioning of her own heart as to the position which Harcourt occupied in it. But the inquiry was now

unavoidable. It was forced upon her by a half-sickening sensation, a vague feeling of loneliness and desolation, which, for the first time during these happy weeks, as she mounted the gloomy oak staircase and threaded the dark panelled corridors to her apartment, recalled the earlier associations of her residence at Plas Newydd. Now, Harcourt's departure was fixed; in one week from that time he must become an utter stranger to the scenes which his animation and intelligence, his sound judgment and refined taste, had invested with an hitherto unknown light and interest. Lucy herself must be separated from him, probably for ever; there was no reason that they should ever meet again; he would take his degree, be ordained, and settle in some remote curacy. The question which ensued upon these reflections was imperative, and could not be dismissed without a direct answer. "Was the separation, which it now appeared was inevitable, a circumstance likely to affect Miss Lucy Akehurst's happiness?" "Of course she should regret it very much," was Lucy's first and somewhat evasive reply to this mental inquisitor. "Mr. Harcourt was an exceedingly agreeable person, and so well-informed and sensible, both her aunt and herself could not fail of missing his society." The inquisitor, however, was not satis-

fied; he repeated the same question as before, but adding various details and circumstantial touches, both as to the past and future, suggesting some highly-coloured sketches of the manner and tone, the eloquence, the poetry, the manly enthusiasm, which had made the hours of the last few weeks glide away like moments on the dial of Lucy's existence; painting at the same time, in vivid contrast with these, the blank isolation in which these dream-like days were now to terminate; and concluding, as the answer was still delayed, by shaping the question somewhat differently, but with still more explicitness: "Was not the said Mr. Harcourt not only an agreeable person, but one who was almost essential to her happiness? had she not, in the happy, unrestrained intercourse of the last few weeks, bound up sympathy, emotion, interest, bright fancies, and deep thoughts, with a heart which, for the first time in her life, she had found capable of appreciating and responding to every pulse and fibre of her own? In short, and not to be tedious, was not Edgar Harcourt *exactly* the very person she had always felt she could love; or, to be still more particular, had she, practically, any great doubt that *she did love him*, and, on the whole, pretty considerably?" Reader, Lucy Akehurst, notwithstanding the splendours of Cheve-

leigh, was a simple girl after all, and must not be judged by fine ladies. When her interrogator reached this point, having no other answer ready, she fairly sate down and wept.

For nearly an hour the young heart wept on, fully and unrestrainedly. It had made a great discovery within itself; it had gained a new power, and one, like all acquisitions of human power, purchased with suffering; it was charged with a mysterious secret, and could no more move free and light-hearted among the unfettered denizens of mirth and sunshine. At the end of the time we have mentioned, Lucy rose from the chair into which she had thrown herself, and dried her tears. She felt she had been imprudent and must now bear the penalty, alone and in silence, as she best might; above all, no trace of the state of her feelings must be given, during the rest of his stay, to the person whom they most concerned. Of any other or more hopeful solution of the entanglement in which she felt she had involved herself, Lucy was too simple-hearted to present to her mind even the possibility. One brief retrospect, one glance at the happy past, Lucy permitted herself, holding it before her gaze almost sternly, as something against which she must guard with watchful sedulity, even while she scanned its attractive

lineaments. But, having done this, she firmly put the thought away from her, resolving henceforth, excepting as a stranger and former friend, never again to think of one whose influence over her own heart she could not but recognise, but from whom she was now to be finally separated. If any feeling of a more agitating nature had sprung up in that young breast, it was but as the breath of a summer breeze stirring the edge of the waters with a faint pulsation, while the clear depths within remained calm and unruffled; an image which the guileless maiden heart saw fleeting before it in unknown distance, but shrunk, in its mysterious instincts, from seeking to embody or arrest. Doubtless, there was much in Harcourt's manner, during the last few days especially, his earnest gaze at times on herself, the intense enthusiasm which he poured into his descriptions of things and places, the still more intense and speaking eloquence of his occasional silence, when some fair scene, sinking deep into the hearts of both, had arrested speech and thought in the simple enjoyment of created beauty, which Lucy could not but have noticed, or at any rate recollected now as noticeable. She would not have been woman had it been otherwise. But with that other and better heart of woman, she forcibly put such recollections

from her, determining, even from her sense of the loftiness of the nature which she now felt she loved only too well, not even in her inmost thought to indulge any weakness which should make her unworthy of that nature, even though to her henceforth it must be but the passing memory of a dream.

Notwithstanding Mrs. Witherby's catalogue of the objects of interest in the vicinity, no excursion was actually set on foot until the Wednesday following the occurrences noticed in our last chapter. On that day, however, Mrs. Witherby decided on carrying into execution the most attractive of these expeditions,—one, in fact, which had been hitherto reserved as a kind of *bon bouche* in the amusements of the summer,—a visit to some waterfalls of remarkable beauty in the neighbourhood, formed by the river into which the Hirnant emptied itself a few miles below Plas Newydd, but which were accessible by a road across the mountains at a much easier distance. It was a lovely June morning when this long-planned expedition at last took place. Old Jenkin's pony Taffy of course accompanied the party, Lucy riding where practicable, and Harcourt lending one or other of his companions an arm where the difficulties of the road necessitated such assistance. At first their route lay down the now

familiar glen of the Hirnant; but they soon quitted its course, and, following a steep mountain road, commenced the ascent of the barren moor, which, as we have elsewhere said, hemmed in the valley on every side. It was about half-way up the acclivity that an incident occurred, which exercised a very important influence upon the occurrences of the day. Harcourt and Lucy were some little distance in advance, the former guiding the pony over a grassy turf mound, by no means devoid of peril, and overhanging a considerable precipice, which formed the only alternative from the so-called road, but really aggregation of unshapely blocks left by the course of a winter torrent, when their advance was arrested by a sudden exclamation from their *chaperon* in the rear. "Goodness gracious!" Mrs. Witherby ejaculated, when she found words to express her dismay at the recollection which had suddenly crossed her mind, "why, it was to-day that Mr. Parry's foreman and the boy were coming all the way from that town—I never can recollect the name—to put up new shelves in the storeroom; and here I am, half-way up the mountains, with the house-keys in my pocket." Having ascertained the cause of the good lady's tribulation, Harcourt offered to return to Plas New*

ydd with the keys, so that the expected visitors might not be disappointed. But this was out of the question. Mrs. Witherby never trusted the house-keys out of her own possession; it was such a temptation to the servants; besides, her own superintendence of the projected repairs was indispensable. "But it is not the least difference," added the good lady; "I will walk back alone, while you and Lucy can go on and see the falls; I shall be sure of having some other opportunity; and really I don't care so very much about waterfalls. There is that waterfall at Lydford, which I went to see once, where you pay sixpence a head, and the miller comes and turns the water on; I really never thought it worth the money."

With genuine politeness, the *politesse* of kindness, for none other would have stood him in stead now, —indeed, the reader may perhaps call it Quixotic, —Harcourt endeavoured to dissuade the old lady from her purpose; at any rate, he urged that they should all return home together, and pursue the excursion some other day; but to these suggestions Mrs. Witherby proved wholly inexorable. It was now Lucy's turn. Never had feelings so opposite contended in that young heart before; but there was one plainly predominant; it was quite im-

possible for her to accompany Harcourt alone on this excursion. Contriving some excuse for the purpose, she came close to Mrs. Witherby's side, and, in a few whispered words, intimated her opinion to that effect. To Lucy's utter dismay, her aunt, far from comprehending the causes of her uneasiness, responded to them in an audible voice, divulging at the same time the communication which had been intended for her own private ear. "Why, bless me, Lucy," said Aunt Witherby, "why shouldn't you go with Mr. Harcourt? do you suppose he would eat you?"

"No, indeed," replied Harcourt, who was close at hand; "we hope to return home in time for luncheon; and, in any case, I do assure you that, as far as I know myself, I should be wholly incapable of such an act of cannibalism. However," continued Harcourt, "I need not say, that if the excursion to the falls is not agreeable to Miss Akehurst, I shall be most happy to forego it."

Mrs. Witherby, however, wholly declined to listen to any such suggestion, and at once resumed her route homeward. Perplexed, uneasy, conscious of the imprudence, with her recently discovered feelings, of the course which was thus forced upon her, and yet feeling still more acutely, that to with-

draw from the projected expedition, under existing circumstances, would either be wholly inexplicable; or, if Harcourt should in any way divine the true cause, would wear the appearance of coquetry, as if she anticipated some corresponding interest on his part, Lucy remounted her pony, and again commenced the ascent of the barren moor. Strange—and yet, by Nature's ordinance, most lovely—that those to whom, except in each other's society, all earth is now a desert, should yet, until the appointed time comes, inhabit that sterile waste in solitude, cloaking from each other the soul's kindred, which, revealed by a few brief words, shall knit heart, mind, and body in one for ever.

Pursuing their upward course for some distance, Harcourt and his fair companion ultimately emerged upon the summit of the moor, which they crossed, and again descended into the broader valley of the main river, at a point a mile or two below where the Hirnant joined it. The valley which they had now entered was one of rare beauty, and by its reputation occasionally attracted tourists even to this little frequented part of Wales. Lucy had never visited it before, and knew nothing of its localities, but she had frequently heard from the country people of the fine rock scenery with which the course of the river

abounded, and the present day appeared to offer a highly favourable opportunity for exploring its recesses. Harcourt's map of the district, although not very accurate, was still sufficiently good to enable them to pursue their general direction with success.

Soon after entering this main valley, the mountain track we have mentioned showed signs of improvement, which were justified by its presently joining a more beaten road, indicated on the map, and forming one of the principal communications of the district. The road followed the course of the river down the valley, usually keeping at a considerable height above it, to avoid the precipitous crags which formed its banks, but occasionally approaching nearer to it at points where the gorge of the stream emerged, as in all river scenery, upon a mile or two of more level and cultivated ground.

Sometimes too, the necessities of communication required some side valley to be gained by a bridge across the main stream, even in its steeper parts; and here the road would again approach the water, selecting a spot which offered a safe support for the abutment of the bridge, and thus affording the traveller a glimpse of striking beauty over its wilder and bolder scenery. One of these bridges occurred about two

miles after Lucy and her escort had joined the main road; it consisted of two arches (one resting on a natural rocky buttress in the bed of the stream), and crossed the river at a considerable height, about two-thirds down the bank; the approach to it from the main road, which still continued on the top of the declivity, being formed by a very rugged and steep descent, imperilling the rider's neck and limbs before placing him in safety on the bridge.

The structure itself was one of that picturesque kind often found in Wales, very old and massive, with a forest of ivy twining round its buttresses, and festooning the crumbling stones of the arches. The view from it was exquisite; and we will endeavour shortly to sketch it, premising that in so doing we are not actuated by any desire to trespass upon the legitimate functions of the landscape painter, but are anxious only to put before the reader, if possible, such features of the scene as are indispensable for a right comprehension of the occurrences which we are presently to relate. With this view, therefore, we respectfully request our readers' *careful* attention to the particular points of the description contained in the next page or two, requesting them to believe that circumstances, which at the time of perusal may appear tedious or irrelevant, are not really intro-

duced on the "penny-a-line" principle, but will be found ultimately quite essential to our narrative.

Placing ourselves then on the bridge, and looking *up* the river, the eye followed a long reach, terminating in a sharp spur of rock projected from that which we shall in future, for perspicuity, call *the right side*; viz. the side which in descending the stream would lie to your right hand; looking *up*, as we are at present doing, it would of course be on the left. Above this spur of rock, the stream made a sharp bend, rendering its upper course invisible, although the general line of the wooded hollow which it occupied might still be traced for some distance.

We have used the familiar term "reach" as the only one which can be employed to express the straight course of the river between this rocky projection and the bridge; but the term would hardly have appeared applicable to the scene which its channel presented at the time of which we are now writing. With few exceptions, the year had hitherto been one of unusual drought, especially for Wales; the grass was a scant crop, and the water had sunk low in the wells, ponds, and streams, occasioning great distress and loss among the cattle; while the foliage of the trees, although it had burst forth under

the influence of the hot suns of the last two or three weeks, still appeared to lack something of its usual fresh "greenh," as if it had been unnaturally forced, and pined for the moisture from which it should have derived its legitimate birth.

The river to which we have now introduced the reader was one of a character likely to show more than usual traces of the long-continued drought. It rose in a lofty chain of mountains at some distance, forming the drainage of almost their entire slope on the side from which it ran, and also receiving in its upper course the waters which descended from a tract of bog or morass of great extent, liable to a quick and sudden overflow in rainy weather, especially when the violent thunder-showers of that part of England beat upon its surface, forcing out by mechanical pressure the stores of its concealed reservoirs; but in a long drought like the present becoming caked and dry like a sponge, and ceasing to discharge any portion of its contents. The river we are describing accordingly now crept between the huge boulders and massy pyramids and blocks of rock which formed its bed, the remnants of the more tempestuous periods of its history, shrunk to an attenuated size, and, as the spectator might have fancied, ashamed of its past

violence, and now rendered incapable of exerting a similar display of force.

Very beautiful, though, much more so than when the torrent dashed by in its strength, was the intensely clear water, tinged with a deep chocolate colour from the peat, and sauntering listlessly along with a drowsy murmur under the broad sunlight, until it reached the bridge where we have stationed ourselves, and where it gathered into a black pool under the arches, large and deep enough apparently to absorb the whole contents of the now diminutive stream. The latter, however, speedily extricated itself, and continued its lazy winding course in and out of the rocks, still more huge and distorted, which composed the channel of the stream below the bridge. To that side, therefore, we will now direct the reader's attention. We have said enough of the character and present appearance of the *stream*; let us now therefore describe the banks, which on this side of the bridge presented a far more picturesque appearance than on the other, the road in fact having selected a point for its transit where the character of the river scenery, comparatively tame and uninteresting for a mile or two previously, again began to exhibit its wilder and more characteristic features.

Looking *down* the river accordingly, the right bank rose speedily into a succession of jutting cliffs, pinnacles, and lofty tower-like crags, wreathed with creepers, and interspersed, where a steep grassy slope for a short distance replaced the precipice, with old gnarled trunks of great age, and occasionally stunted underwood and heather. This *right* bank of the river, in fact, was for several miles far the more precipitous of the two; that opposite to it, probably from some variation in the strata, offered scenes of softer beauty, being almost entirely clothed with deep woods of all shapes and tints, with a bare rocky knoll or projecting crag only here and there appearing through it. Nothing could exceed the loveliness of the contrast thus opened to the eye between the two sides; the channel of the river descending rapidly between them in a graceful tortuous course, and at present throwing them into greater apparent height from the unusual lowness of the water in its bed.

The right bank was, as may be imagined, utterly pathless: any one who had attempted to follow it would have been compelled perpetually to ascend almost to its summit, in order to turn the cliffs which interfered with his direct course. On

the opposite side, however, there were the traces of a rough path through the wood; and after gazing a few minutes at the scene we have described, Harcourt and Lucy decided on pursuing it.

Having crossed the bridge, accordingly, they at once deserted the road to the side valley, and followed a rude cart-track which led through the wood in a direction straight down the stream, gradually descending to a small level strip, half beach and half grass, on its edge. Here the cart-track ceased: it was apparently little used, having probably been constructed to haul stone from the river for fences or outbuildings in some adjoining farm. A very rough scrambling footpath, however, still led on down the stream; and Harcourt proposed that they should tie up the pony here, the place being quite out of view of the bridge (had any passer-by in that primitive district been disposed to appropriate poor Taffy), and pursue the path downwards towards the waterfalls which formed the object of their visit. The day, too, had become intensely hot and sultry, and the shade of the dense wood offered such a welcome shelter from the scorching June sun, that Lucy felt it impossible to decline, and they accordingly started on the expedition.

Perhaps it was the heat of the day, or perhaps— which think you, reader?—it was the mutual consciousness, as yet wholly unavowed, to one of the party at least, of the secret that had yet to be told,— that *must* be spoken, sooner or later; and yet the speaking of which would be, both to speaker and listener, like the plunge into a strange world—final, irretrievable, infinite in its consequences, uncertain, yet not without a wild thrilling hope;—it may, we say, have been the consciousness of this mysterious revelation, which each felt, in spite of all their reasonings to the contrary, to be imminent, and yet each endeavoured to think of as something very distant, which made the present day's ramble decidedly not less pleasant, and yet less joyous and unrestrained, than those which Lucy and Harcourt had so often shared together in the earlier weeks of their acquaintance. At any rate, they certainly spoke less and laughed less. The path lay up and down, in and out of tangled copsewood and prickly thorn, over tree-roots and knotty stumps, along rocky ledges and by the edge of dangerous pitfalls, in every variety of pedestrian adventure; and yet the numerous slips, alarms, and comical incidents, which at times required all Harcourt's adroitness to avert their consequences in a torn scarf or strained ankle to his fair charge, and

which would in former excursions have elicited endless merriment from the sufferer, now passed either in silence, or with a half-smile which really was much too solemn for the occasion. Even Harcourt's gallantry seemed to have declined. He would allow his companion at times to surmount even formidable difficulties without his proffered aid ; while she, for her part, far from taking offence at his want of politeness, appeared to feel it actually a relief.

And so they scrambled on for a considerable distance, really with most exemplary staidness of demeanour,—a Quaker's meeting could hardly have exhibited more gravity. Blameless hypocrisy ! not of those who assume a mask which shall impose upon the eyes of others, but of two hearts guileless, untainted, each seeking to hide from its own gaze the deep emotion which is throbbing at the roots of being, and which it feels too intensely to brook confessing even to itself.

Lucy and Harcourt had followed the path about a mile from the bridge, when it began to ascend rather rapidly through the wood : at the same time they became aware of a dull reverberating sound, continuous, but rather feeble, apparently at no great distance. A turn in the path, which had rounded a steep ledge of rock and now began to descend still

more steeply than it had mounted, soon revealed the cause. They had for some time been out of sight of the river: it now re-appeared, compressed into a narrow channel between its two banks, which here approached each other within a few feet; and plunging down, in one leap, in a corner of the left bank, was received in a natural basin of black rock, from which it overflowed into a deep pool, similar to that under the bridge.

The fall was one of considerable height and merit. At present, the low state of the water had much diminished its volume, but perhaps given it the charm of greater elegance. In rainy weather, the mass of water, dashing over the ledges in the narrow space between the two rocks, although more imposing, must have destroyed much of its peculiar character.

This, then, was the object of the day's excursion; the lower fall, which they also proposed to visit, was, as Harcourt ascertained by his map, a short distance down the stream. The path they had been following on the left side, apparently continued on to this lower fall, but it was decided that they should rest before pursuing it; the white barkless trunk of a tree, brought down by the river in some of its former floods, and now lying in its bed, forming a con-

venient seat, of which, at Harcourt's suggestion, Lucy availed herself for a few minutes.

Beautiful, indeed, this spot was! the fall sounding, almost with the musical tinkle of a chime of bells, overhead; the water rustling among the huge rocks at their feet; on one side, the deep wood which still continued to form the *left* bank below the fall; on the other, the cliffs of the *right* bank; the intensely blue sky and still sunshine over all. But we must hasten on with our narrative.

Probably in no part of the river did the *right* (or rocky) bank present more remarkable features than where our pedestrians were now seated, some thirty or forty yards below the fall. One part of this in particular so struck Lucy's eye, that she could not forbear pointing it out to her companion, with the genuine appreciation of an artist's taste. To the same object also we must venture to call our reader's closest attention, premising as before, that it is intimately connected with the occurrences which are to follow.

Let the reader, then, follow Lucy's eye to a point between the two falls, where the right bank, which has hitherto kept almost a straight line from the upper fall, trends away at a sharp angle towards

the lower, the stream of course making the same bend. This salient point, however, is formed not by the main cliff, but by a partially detached crag rising to about two thirds its height, and separated from it, on the side of the upper fall, by the bed of a small watercourse now dry; on the side of the lower fall, by a deep fissure in the cliff, not running inwards at right angles with the river, but almost parallel with its course in the direction of the upper fall, and forming, in fact, a huge cavern. The bank by the side of the *watercourse* is a steeply inclined grass slope, admitting of a precarious footing; on the side of the *fissure* or cavern, it is perpendicular rock, wholly pathless. The cavern, itself, runs into the interior, between the projecting crag and the main cliff, as far as the eye can reach, with a singular looking ledge of some breadth (not upon the crag but upon the main cliff), running in the same direction, a few feet above the ground. This fissure does not extend through to the watercourse, so as to leave the crag entirely detached, but if prolonged a short distance further, it probably would do so: in this case, a person following the ledge in the inside would be able, supposing the orifice large enough, to climb out over the narrow bed of the watercourse

on to the sloping bank between it and the fall ; otherwise, this would be impossible.

One word more, before we conclude this description, as to the detached crag itself. This rose, as we have said, to about two thirds of the height of the main cliff from which it had separated, and presented a highly picturesque appearance ; the upper part, perhaps, for about twenty feet down, being covered with creepers, while the portion below this, probably about forty feet more, descended to what in the ordinary state of the river was the water's edge, in a bare scarp. What added to the beauty, as well as the singularity of this object was, that just at the point where the vegetation ceased, a large tree, still young and vigorous, and which had probably much augmented the separation of the two parts of the rock, forced itself out from the fissure almost in a horizontal position, its lower branches growing downwards until they reached within twelve or fifteen feet of the ledge we have mentioned ; and this object it was which had first attracted Lucy's notice to the spot.

We have only to add that the detached mass of rock bent forward considerably over the river, apparently with little support from behind ; in fact, consi-

derable portions of the rock seemed already to have fallen, and now lay in shattered masses of *débris* at its foot, blocking up what would have been the floor of the fissure or cavern, but affording access with no great difficulty to the ledge which ran along its side. As regards the effect upon the eye, the detached crag we have described, when seen from the upper fall, presented the appearance of a huge ivy-covered tower, inclined at a somewhat formidable angle towards the stream; while opposite to it, or from points lower down the river, it had more the character of a vast wall or rampart, built out as a kind of protection to the main body of the cliff, but now ruinous and in imminent danger of falling forward and leaving the interior surface bare. But it is time to return from this somewhat lengthened delineation.

Lucy and her companion got on better after a few minutes' rest. What Harcourt *might* have said or done, or might have thought of saying or doing, under such auspicious circumstances, we must leave the reader to guess. The time for it, however, had not at any rate arrived yet; for Lucy, perhaps with some undefined intention, started up, not in coquetry but with the quick step of the startled fawn, from her temporary seat, and rallying her old voice and manner (in which she seemed to anticipate more

protection than in the more sombre mood of the last hour or two), announced her intention of going to explore the lower fall. On they went accordingly ; not by the path through the wood now, but following the dry channel of the river; now over a slippery ledge of mossy rock, down the side of which the water oozed and trickled in narrow grooves; now clambering some huge block, the trophy of the tempest which years ago had detached it from the neighbouring crags; now driven by insuperable obstacles to return again to the easier footing on the bank; and now again attempting, with adventurous daring, the insecure pathway of the stream. It was pleasant toil enough; and Lucy, having recovered and found her advantage in her usual light-hearted tones, took care not to let them desert her again. And thus, sporting in their young life and mirth on the brink of a more serious precipice, that plunge into love and love's consequences which is to fashion the whole life for happiness or disaster, they reached and looked over the steep acclivity and whirling eddies of the second fall. There seemed even less water, however, here than in the upper one; this was in fact rather a cascade, the river flowing over it at its full breadth, and with a descent of probably not more than thirty feet. The interruption to the

progress of the stream, moreover, which occasioned it to take this second leap, was caused, not as in the other case, by the ground breaking away into a natural wall of rock, but by an accumulation of the massive blocks which composed the main bed of the stream; so that the water in its present state was almost lost to the eye, oozing between their crannies, and disappearing in the interstices of the disrupted masses; it would, in fact, have been quite feasible to climb down the fall to the bottom, and Harcourt proposed the excursion.

Lucy, however, was now rather foot-weary, and the descent would, with her, have occupied some time; so the expedition was given up. As they left the brink, Harcourt caught sight of the main road, which they had quitted an hour or two before, and which now, having descended to the level of the river, below the second fall, emerged again upon its right bank, which there offered, for some distance, a less precipitous slope. Their return to the foot of the upper fall was effected much as they came, except that Lucy was now a good deal tired, and really needed help in the rough and somewhat precarious transit; the day besides had, during the last hour or two, grown intensely hot and sultry, the sun of the early afternoon blazing almost imme-

diately overhead. On reaching the deep pool, into which the upper fall descended, Lucy was fain to beg for a few minutes' rest before rejoining the pony; and as there was still ample time for their return home, they seated themselves on a shelf of rock, projecting over the pool, and effectually screened by the tall cliffs of the right bank from the now almost intolerable glare of the sunlight. It was an intensely still scene; far more, it seemed, than when they were last there; there was no breath of air stirring, no song of birds, no hum of insects, none of those undefined whisperings of sound which, even in the greatest solitudes, show the presence of the living world around us; even the dash of the water down the fall, and the gurgling of the tiny rills, which lazily crept and twined themselves in and out of the recesses of the rocky channel, seemed *muffled*; as if they had been at a great distance. But that which was stillness itself, motionless, voiceless, death-like repose, was the deep stony basin by which they sate. Who has not seen one of these among our English mountains? a gulf of liquid crystal, interminable in its clearness, drawing down the eye, as if by a kind of fascination, through its transparent chambers, green, blue, or rich ruddy brown, according to the colouring matter of the water, or

the mosses of its rock-hewn cistern, into the profundity and nethermost world of its unexplored depths. They are weird-looking places at all times; but to-day, as Lucy and Harcourt sate beside the pool, watching (as the sun advanced in the heavens) the shadow of the cliff under which they had ensconced themselves travel slowly over its surface, turning it into the blackest ebony, they could almost have imagined that they gazed on one of the enchanted lakes of the "Arabian Nights," the dwelling-place of genii and malignant spirits; or on that fearful and salt-encrusted sea, beneath whose waters the cities of the plain lie engulfed in perpetual oblivion. Half-an-hour or more had elapsed since they took their seat by the pool, and yet hardly a dozen words had passed between them; latterly they had not even spoken at all. It was not now the reserve of mutual consciousness, which had, as we have said, somewhat checked their gaiety in the earlier part of the day; it was something wholly external to themselves,—an oppression, a leaden dulness in the almost furnace glow and withering stillness of the atmosphere and surrounding objects, which seemed to forbid conversation; a "horror of great silence" fell upon them. Lucy was the first to break it; she had previously looked up once or twice

to the top of the fall, which fronted her where they sate, with rather a remarkable expression. "It is very strange!" she exclaimed, in a somewhat subdued tone of voice.

"What is strange?" replied Harcourt; "I have noticed you looking towards the fall for some time; what do you see there?" As Harcourt spoke, instead of adopting the course which would certainly have given him the readiest reply to his question — namely, by following Lucy's eyes in the direction they had so long pursued, — he turned his own with a deep earnest gaze upon the fair face of the speaker, thereby showing that something was nearer his thoughts than the remark she had just made, and occasioning some embarrassment to the young lady herself; causing her, in fact, to execute the counter manœuvre of dropping her own bright orbs to a wild flower which she held in her hand, and which she now, apparently with a botanical interest in its construction, began to dissect with great care and assiduity, answering her companion at the same time.

"Oh! you will think me very foolish and fanciful, Mr. Harcourt; but I have been so struck with the appearance of that distant mountain which we see peering just over the top of the fall."

Harcourt, as he was at least bound to do in good

manners, looked up at the point indicated, where he certainly saw something, and then returned his eyes to their previous scrutiny of the sweet young face before him, the owner of which was still occupied with her botanical researches. Lucy continued :—

“ What seems to me strange is, that I cannot at all recollect seeing it in that place when we rested here just now. That was rather nearer the left bank, to be sure, and so perhaps the mountain was concealed ; but still it strikes me we ought to have seen it, even from there. And the most curious thing is—I know you will laugh at me, Mr. Harcourt—that while I have been looking at it, it really seemed to me to be changing its place, and growing larger ; I noticed it particularly after looking away for a minute or two ; the last time, I could have felt almost sure that the strip of sky between it and the cliff on this side of the fall had become less.”

“ What a charming superstition, Miss Akehurst,” replied Harcourt, whose poetry quickly seized on the thought, breaking at the same time the spell of silence under which they seemed hitherto to have lain ; “ it is quite in character with this extraordinary scene and day, which really seem to benumb one with a kind of witchery. Do you know what your idea reminds me of ? It is a tale I lately read in

‘Blackwood,’ one of the most powerful and original which have appeared even in that able periodical; it is called the ‘Iron Shroud:’ did you ever read it?”

“Never,” replied Lucy; “what was it about?”

“Well, I ought not to spoil it; in fact, I do not recollect the detail; but the idea—I cannot resist just telling it you—was that of a prisoner in some German castle, who had fallen into the power of his most malevolent enemy. He is put into prison one evening, and being of course unhappy, takes no particular notice of surrounding objects. The next day, on waking up, he looks round the chamber, which is made of iron and of some size, and feels a little surprised at finding there are only six windows to it; he fancied he remembered seven, but he had not observed with much attention. The next morning he is still more surprised; there are only five windows now; how he could have made such a mistake in counting seems incredible, but of course so it must be; he must have reckoned a window too much the day before. When the third morning breaks, however, it is clear that, whatever it was, it was no *mistake*: the windows are reduced to *four* now. And then a terrible conviction flashes across him—it’s magnificently described—and the room gradually contracts, leaving a window less each

day ; until on the last day, when there was only one window—oh! I forgot, by the way, he had found a writing scratched on the wall a short time before, telling him what was to happen—the whole four sides of the room contract together, and close in round his pallet, which is of iron too ; then the roof begins to descend, and then, immediately over his head—”

The sentence remained unfinished.

CHAP. VII.

“ Deep in the azure noon of day,
We saw, with panic soul,
The fires of red Olympus play ;
Its thunders shook the pole ;
No cloud the vault of æther bore,
Nor wrapt in tempest, as of yore,
The king of nations came ;
Amid the pure and breathless sky
The glittering coursers leapt on high,
The chariot rolled in flame.”

HOR. Od. i. 34, 5.

WHAT happened over the head of the unfortunate captive mentioned in our last chapter was, if we remember the tale aright, the tolling of a deep funeral bell. What occurred immediately over the head of Harcourt and his fair companion, was the explosion—it is the only word to describe it—of a sudden flash of lightning, so close, so dazzling, tracking its jagged course in the hot sulphurous sky so distinctly (as if it lingered in the congenial atmosphere), and followed, almost in the same instant, by a crash of thunder so loud and terrific, that Lucy involuntarily clung to Harcourt's arm. He looked

up at the head of the fall now in earnest. There was Lucy's mountain indeed now ; no possibility of mistake about it ; the rest of the sky remained perfectly clear and bright for a few minutes longer, intensely blue, almost purple in its colouring ; but in the direction she had indicated, exactly over the chasm where the river took its leap, marched, slowly and majestically, a jet black, conical-headed cloud, with hard firm edges, the compressed electricity seeming to gleam from underneath them, like the coruscations of an Aurora. A second flash, angry, terrible, close at hand, hot and quivering like the first, rapidly followed the momentary glance they had thrown at their formidable neighbour ; again the mass of confined air steamed, thrilled, seemed to grow quick and instinct with its kindred fire ; again, rattling and sharp among the near crags, booming in hollow reverberation among the more remote, and the mountain chain which took it up and tossed it backwards and forwards in a thousand wild echoes, the living voice of the thunder spoke from the dense bosom of the cloud. There was evidently no time to be lost ; a few huge heavy rain-drops followed the second clap, and pattered in the dark pool at their feet ; in a few minutes more the storm would descend upon them in its violence. Already

the edges of other clouds began to show up over the contracted horizon of the spot where they stood; ashen-white, turgid, pallid masses, trailing confusedly from all quarters of the sky, in the wake of that which had formed the vanguard. Harcourt hastily ran over in his mind the possibilities and feasibilities of shelter. The wood, through which their path had lain in the morning would have protected them from an ordinary shower, but it would be no defence against such torrents of rain as now appeared to be impending; besides, in the highly electrical state of the air, it would offer a most dangerous position. To ascend the upper fall was physically impracticable; the lower one they might have probably reached, and descended to the point of the road we have already mentioned; but even then they had no security for finding any available place of refuge; and the rapidly increasing fall of the heavy premonitory drops, plashing in the water beside them, showed that they would not reach even this point with impunity. The only alternative was the precipitous right bank; but what protection could they hope for there? The word rose to Lucy's lips almost instantaneously, "The chasm!" This was the deep fissure in the rock we have already endeavoured to describe: it was out of sight from where

they stood, being concealed by the projecting or detached rock we have mentioned ; but a few minutes' active exertion on Lucy's part, aided by her companion's strong arm, soon brought her to the foot of it ; and from this it was no formidable task to mount on the broad ledge or platform which, as we have said, ran into the interior of the fissure, and which was accessible over the broken fragments of rock below. The last step alone was difficult, the uppermost of these fragments being six or seven feet below the platform ; but Harcourt climbed upon it, and with his assistance, and that of a slight projection of white spar which ran diagonally down the rock below the ledge, Lucy soon occupied the same position.

They were only just in time, for now, indeed, the rain came ; a deluge such as would hardly be experienced in less mountainous regions ; pouring like a torrent from the clouds, not in isolated drops, but in a hard continuous downfall, as if, in the words of Holy Writ, the windows of heaven were broken up. Happily, the shelter chosen by Lucy and Harcourt, was a complete protection ; the storm came from the side on which the detached rock stood, and the latter, being in advance of the general line of the cliff, formed a perfect screen. They heard the rain wash-

ing, gurgling, rushing, almost wailing in its vehemence overhead and around them, but not a drop penetrated within the fissure; the lightning still blazed forth at intervals, and the thunder pealed among the rocks (with diminished violence, indeed, as if quenched and subdued by the greater fury of the storm waters), but the danger, which had at first appeared imminent, was evidently lessened; and both Lucy and Harcourt fully appreciated the friendly retreat which had stood them in such good stead. At last, after about three quarters of an hour of incessant rain, the storm showed symptoms of having done its worst; a few drops still fell at intervals, and heavy murky clouds hung round the sky, but the journey homeward was now practicable. There would have been no difficulty in recrossing the bed of the river to the path on the left bank by which they had reached it, and so returning to the place where poor Taffy had been stationed (doubtless feeling very ill-used) all this time; in fact, Harcourt was surprised to see how little effect the tremendous rain had produced upon the stream; a few muddy puddles had collected here and there from the washing of the shower down the banks, and the river was slightly discoloured in parts from the same cause; but with these exceptions, its appearance was

in no way altered from that which it presented before the storm. Harcourt pointed this out to Lucy as remarkable, and at the same time fortunate; "He had always understood," he said, "that the Welsh streams flooded very rapidly, and he had anticipated, if the rain had continued, some trouble in following the channel of the river." They were on the point of starting accordingly for the other side, when it occurred to Harcourt that it would be a better plan to leave Lucy where she was, and go himself for the pony, bringing it down to the point below the second fall, where the road again approached the stream; Lucy could then descend, under his escort, along the bed of the river, and down the broken rocks of the second fall. This route, although steep, would be far shorter and less fatiguing than her return back for a mile along the wood, now dripping wet, and in which the difficulties of the narrow broken path they had followed in the morning, would now be greatly aggravated. Lucy fully approved of this change of plan; "She had not the least fear of remaining alone where she was during Mr. Harcourt's absence; indeed, it was still raining fast enough to make her glad of the shelter." Harcourt accordingly started. His original intention had been to reach Taffy's station by following the left bank, but he now recol-

lected that the river had made a very considerable detour below the bridge, and that the distance, which, by following the path they had come, had extended to more than a mile, would probably be surmounted by the main road in less than half that space. He accordingly pursued the route by which he intended presently to take Lucy. The descent of the lower fall proved even easier than he had anticipated, and the saving of the distance, by following the main road, also verified the theory he had formed of it. Pressing rapidly onwards to rejoin Lucy as quickly as possible, and surmounting with a quick step the steep declivities by which the road performed the descent which the river achieved in its two leaps, Harcourt soon found himself at the bridge; not more than twenty minutes had elapsed from the time of his quitting Lucy's retreat.

He had not walked so fast, however, but that from time to time he became conscious of a singular booming sound, apparently that of water, but for which he was at a loss altogether to account. At first he thought it might be the fall at the foot of which they had so long stood; and he felt surprised that the body of sound produced by it should be so much greater here than lower down. Gradually, however, he found that the peculiar sound which had

arrested his attention could not be owing to this cause; it was of a wholly different character from the light dashing of the fall; and besides, it evidently increased in volume the further he receded from their late position. A strange, hollow, inexplicable sound it was, varying in intensity, apparently as some intervening obstacle deadened it for the time, and then again, by its removal, allowed of its being heard in full force; indeed, after every such interval, it seemed to return with augmented violence, amounting, as Harcourt drew near the bridge, to a loud continuous roar, almost that of thunder. Harcourt did not, however, pause to ascertain its cause, for he was anxious to release Lucy from her confinement; some fall higher up the river, he thought, or possibly the stream of the lateral valley, might have been more affected by the late heavy shower. The supposition, indeed, was hardly enough to account for the Niagara-like burst of sound with which the whole atmosphere round seemed now to throb, as if by a kind of pulsation; but the time did not allow of his seeking a more plausible solution, and he advanced upon the bridge. He was half way over the first arch, when suddenly, round the projecting spur of rock we have mentioned some pages back, and down the long reach above the bridge, compact, swift,

irresistible, darting like the bolt from the cross-bow, hurling to one side rather than bearing along with it the impediments in its path, panting with a red frothy foam, quivering with haste and rage, burst a mass of water, filling the entire channel from side to side, and rising high up, probably twenty feet and more, on each bank; its advancing front scarped like a precipice, or as we may suppose the waves of the Red Sea to have stood, congealed into an upright wall by the Prophet's rod, until they broke forth to overwhelm the struggling chariots of the Egyptians.

In fact, an event unknown, excepting in mountainous districts, and even there occurring only at rare intervals, had now taken place. A waterspout had broken in the neighbourhood of the river; descending, in the lower part of its course, in the violent rain we have described; but streaming down, in the spot where the cloud actually discharged itself, in one unbroken mass, like the bursting of a reservoir. The ground, hardened with the long drought, refused to absorb any part of the body of fluid thus suddenly poured upon it, even had the time admitted of its doing so; and the water that had fallen was accordingly carried in one huge flood down the rocky stream we have described, which formed the main drainage of the country; the

pressure of the heavy rain upon the surface of the boggy moors at its upper extremity contributing, at the same time, a formidable addition to its volume. The river god had wakened from his slumber in the mountain cavern, and now strode abroad upon the earth, desolating and resistless!

Harcourt instinctively drew back from the bridge. He was just in time; onward, in unbroken flight, rushed the watery avalanche; the frail bridge did not impede its progress for a single instant; with a heavy dash and swirl it spun the shattered masses out of its path, and in a moment a few tottering fragments, with the long tendrils of broken ivy which still adhered to them, dancing in the water by their side, were all that remained to show the position of the late structure.

For a minute or two, Harcourt stood almost riveted to the spot by a kind of spell, the fascination of great exhibitions of physical force, when we behold them unexpectedly and for the first time; a feeling more of awe and reverence than of personal terror. On recovering his self-possession, his first thought—he expressed it audibly—was, “Poor Taffy!” for the place where the pony had been tied was close to the water’s edge. Not, indeed, that he quite got to the end of Taffy’s name either; suddenly over-

poweringly, choking utterance and almost breath, a *second* thought, too terrible for words, almost for distinct apprehension, shaped itself dimly in his mind, "Was Lucy safe? was it possible that the flood could have reached the spot where he had left her standing?" It hardly seemed so; and yet the height, the prodigious mass of that fearful burst of waters;—he might have been deceived, too, in the elevation of the rock above the bed of the river. Wildly, frantically, Harcourt dashed up the steep lane and down the main road which he had just ascended. To return to the rock by the route he came was now of course impossible; in fact, his impatience would not have allowed him to do so in any case. Noticing the general features of the scene, and particularly the declivities of the road he was pursuing, he quitted it at the point where a long steep pitch seemed to indicate that it was making the same descent which the river performed in its first leap, and forcing his way through tangled brushwood and broken seams of rock, he at last arrived upon the edge of the cliff overlooking the river. He had been right in his theory as to the spot; immediately on his left hand, stirred into the energy of fury now, was the upper fall, seething, boiling, hurling down the water in one sheet of bubbling

foam, with a roar and vehemence that seemed as if it would have riven to atoms the narrow walls of rock which confined it, into the black pool by which Lucy and Harcourt had sate, now only to be traced by the momentary interruption it caused to the course of the torrent below the fall. At some distance down, a dense white steam, and a still more deafening thunder of the water, indicated the position of the lower fall; between the two was the precarious shelter which held, Harcourt felt—oh! with what agony of suspense now—all that was most precious to him on earth. Too agitated to choose his path, he struggled forward, torn and lacerated with the brambles which grew densely on the edge of the cliff, to a point which he imagined must be in the close vicinity of the spot where Lucy had been left. Some minutes elapsed, but at last, faint and bleeding with his frantic efforts, he found himself immediately over the place, its exact position being indicated by the detached crag we have described, and which, did not reach to the top of the main cliff, but rose at one edge into a sharp point, about one-third of the way down the latter. Twining his arm round the stem of a bush close to the edge, poor Harcourt strained himself forward over the precipice. Alas! he could see nothing. The main cliff, on a platform

of which Lucy stood, was nowhere a straight scarp; for about the first forty feet down it sloped outwards, while from that elevation to the bed of the stream it was inclined at a considerable angle in the opposite direction; so that any object on it, below the point where it began to slope inwards, was of course invisible to a spectator from above. All that Harcourt could see was the left, wooded bank and about one third of the same side of the swollen stream, heaving and surging by with almost unabated velocity, although the mass of water now proceeded not from the first burst of the waterspout, which by this time had travelled miles down the valley, but from the subsequent heavy rain streaming down the bare face of the mountains, and still more, forcing out the long pent up contents of the marshy or boggy moors which discharged themselves by innumerable smaller channels into its course; so that, in fact, the level of the water continued at least as high as it had been when the descent of the torrent first commenced. Again and again Harcourt flung himself forward over the face of the cliff in the hope, unhappily doomed to disappointment, of gaining a view over its lower declivity. Again and again he shouted Miss Akehurst's name; but the height at which he stood above, and the deafen-

ing splash and roar of the waters underneath, made this evidently useless. Once only he fancied, he could not be sure, that he heard Lucy's voice; the words were quite inaudible, and even the sound itself, although it certainly appeared as if her clear distinct tones had penetrated the confused uproar around, was too faint to allow of his building much hope upon it.

Harcourt rose to his feet and pressed both hands distractedly upon his throbbing temples; a cold deadly sweat, an agony as it were of death, broke forth over his whole frame. How to relieve this intolerable suspense! Had he been on the *left* bank he would have seen the object of his quest at once; but there was no bridge now for many miles. As to the *right* bank, on which he stood, the fissure having proved to be invisible from above, must, Harcourt knew, be still more so from any other spot; the rock in which it occurred forming a salient point in the river, which trended away both above and below at a sharp angle. The anguish of the moment was intolerable.

Suddenly Harcourt recollected the steep but not perpendicular slope of the right bank, which immediately adjoined the detached mass on the side nearest to the upper fall, being separated from it only by the

thin thread of the watercourse. It would not, it is true, give him access to the cavern, or even allow of his seeing into the latter; but Harcourt remembered, as the reader may perhaps do, that a dense mass of creepers grew on the upper part of this detached mass, and he was not without hope that he might be able, by their aid, to descend within sight of the fissure. It was hardly a minute's work to reach the point, about half-way down the grassy slope, where the separation of this rocky fragment began; the young lover plunged rather than ran down its sides, and swinging himself on to the rock by one of the low bushes to which it gave nourishment, commenced his perilous descent. It required all his strength and dexterity; from root to root, from fibre to fibre, he swung himself lightly and cautiously; often the dry stem snapped under his hand, or the treacherous mass of stone and moss slid from beneath his foot. With all Harcourt's eagerness it was tedious work; a moment's rashness might have cost him his life, and the bare wall of rock, seventy or eighty feet down, over which he hung suspended, the torrent roaring and chafing at its very base, compelled him, if he meant to attain his object of saving Lucy or knowing her fate, to proceed with every sense and faculty on the alert. At last, still descending the crag transversely in

the direction of the fissure, he came in sight of the large tree we have described, which grew out from its interior. His impatience was now almost fatal to him, for he lost his footing, and retained only a precarious hold on the matted stems of the creepers, which he had clutched in slipping downwards; a giddy faintness came over him, and his grip of the frail support seemed relaxing, when he felt that his feet touched some of the uppermost branches of the tree. Rallying his strength for a last effort, he succeeded in planting one knee firmly on the broad stem, and then looked down into the fissure.

Lucy was there! He could not, owing to the inclination of the rock inwards, see the ledge on which she stood; but he saw her face; it was pale, very pale, but she was evidently uninjured, and not more agitated than might have been expected from the surprise of her situation, and the risk which she had so narrowly escaped. Her face was turned upwards, for the noise which Harcourt had made in descending had attracted her attention, although she was not aware of the cause; as she now saw him, and heard his suppressed exclamation, "Thank God!" a very evident glow, in spite of herself, suffused her cheek, and she greeted him with a bright smile; at the same lecturing him, not, it must be confessed, with any

great severity, on his having placed himself in a position of such hazard. Harcourt, however, was too much occupied with considering how to extricate Lucy from her own unpleasant situation to admit of many words. He feared, from what he recollected, that the ledge on which she stood was only accessible from the bed of the stream, which now, probably, could not be traversed for some days; on the side of the detached crag he knew there could be no exit; but possibly there might be on the other, and he asked Lucy to examine there. Her report was unfavourable; the ledge, as it approached the outside of the fissure, grew narrower and narrower, and at length terminated in the bare scarp of the main cliff. Harcourt's own position on the trunk of the tree was about twenty feet above Lucy's head; but the vegetation ceased there, and was replaced by perpendicular rock; so that if he could have advised such a precarious mode of exit, it was wholly unattainable.

Harcourt was not uneasy, for he knew that succour could be procured, but this would involve an irksome confinement and delay to Lucy, probably of some hours, and he determined, before resorting to this last expedient, to try if some readier mode of escape from this unintentional trap were not practi-

cable. Again he swung himself up the rock, experiencing less difficulty now that his anxiety did not interfere with the caution necessary to guide his movements; and climbing up the grassy slope, returned once more to the brow of the cliff, feeling almost light-hearted from the contrast of his present sensations with the agony he had previously undergone on the same spot. There was still, it is true, a vague sensation of uneasiness upon his mind; perhaps it was the terrible agitation of the swollen river, the noise and uproar of which, far from seeming to diminish, had actually, Harcourt thought, increased during the last half-hour,—the violence of the water, as it dashed over the upper fall, being now perfectly terrific. Perhaps, too, the appearance of fresh masses of inky cloud overhead, which presently resulted in a second storm of lightning and rain, hardly inferior in violence to the first, may have added to the uncomfortable impressions for which Harcourt would have found it hard to assign a defined cause. At any rate, the feeling of security and calm but intense joy which he had experienced on first being assured of Lucy's safety, had now passed away, and he pursued his search along the cliff for some practicable mode of exit with a melancholy foreboding of some unexplained danger. The search occupied con-

siderable time, more than half an hour, and was wholly fruitless. From height to height of the broken edge and varied outline of the cliff, Harcourt leaped, and ran, and struggled, often at the risk of neck and limb, and through every variety of obstacle, drenched to the skin too with the pelting rain; but examine where he would, no vestige of any path from the fissure presented itself.

At length, dejected with his ill-success, Harcourt returned once more to the now familiar route, perilous as it was, down the cliff, and again knelt upon the projecting tree. Lucy was standing where he left her; but he was immediately struck with a marked alteration in her appearance; the glow with which she had welcomed him before had now entirely disappeared, and was replaced by a livid, ashy paleness; one arm hung beside her, the other was raised to her face, the back of the hand resting almost on her mouth, and the head itself being turned to one side, as if to shut out the presence of some terrible spectacle at her feet; the rigidity of death was over the whole form and countenance of the fair young girl. Andromeda might have stood so, when, in solitude and despair, she awaited, on her rocky prison, the approach of the monster that was to devour her. Harcourt

spoke first; he had some difficulty now in making himself audible; unmistakably, the tumult of the water, plashing, roaring, wailing round them in all directions, had now much increased.

"I have been a long time absent, Miss Akehurst, but I was unwilling to leave any chance untried. I am very sorry to say that I have had no success; there is absolutely no mode of leaving the cavern on foot: and it will be hours, of course, perhaps days, before the water subsides. I am really afraid that I must now desert you for a much longer time, and go to fetch some help; if there is no nearer place, there is the farm we passed soon before turning into the main road; it cannot be more than two or three miles away at the furthest, and I should soon be back here with help."

Lucy had looked up when Harcourt spoke; her face was still of the same deadly paleness, but her manner, since Harcourt's return, had seemed more composed; she now changed the position of her hands, joining them in front of her, but did not speak. Harcourt continued, assuming, in his tone and manner, a gaiety which he certainly did not altogether feel.

"I am afraid it will be rather an adventure, Miss Akehurst, but there will not be the least risk. I

will make the men bring a chair, and, with the help of some ropes, we shall draw you up easily to a place of safety; the height is not much more than that of a ship's side, and I have often seen ladies lowered and raised that way at Plymouth. It will be a kind of miniature scene from the 'Antiquary;' what *will* your aunt say?"

Lucy was still silent. Harcourt thought she was frightened at the proposed mode of exit, and changed his tone. "I ought not, perhaps, to have seemed to jest, Miss Akehurst, for of course it will require some nerve upon your part; I will not disguise that. Still, I do assure you there will not be the possibility of risk at this trifling height; when the ropes come, I shall be able to descend to where you are, and can guide the chair up easily. The only serious part of it is the long time which I fear I must be absent, in order to procure assistance; but I have seen enough of you to feel confident you will not allow yourself to be terrified by any imaginary danger while I am away. I assure you that, in the course of two hours at the very utmost, I shall be back with ample help."

Lucy at last spoke; it was in a low and rather sad, but perfectly calm tone: "Mr. Harcourt, in much less than two hours I shall not be alive."

Harcourt shook from head to foot with extreme terror and surprise. "What *can* you mean, Miss Akehurst? what can possibly harm you? I will stay here gladly to protect you, if you apprehend anything, although I believe it would be the most prudent course to leave you for a short time to procure assistance; still, you know that I will do whatever you may judge best. Dear Miss Akehurst, what *can* I say to reassure you?"

There was again a pause: when Lucy at length spoke, her voice was lower than ever, but still firm and very clear, and Harcourt's strained ear caught every syllable.

"I know you would do everything, everything; indeed, Mr. Harcourt, I do not doubt this. But you do not know; you cannot of course see it from where you are. Mr. Harcourt, I grieve much to have to tell you, *the water is rising*; rising very, very fast."

Lucy paused slightly, and then resumed: — "It has been rising ever since you last left me; at least, I did not observe it before, after the first flood came down. I know how it has risen *now*, by a piece of white spar running down to the water's edge, which you may remember I stepped on in climbing here; when you left me, I could see a large piece of this,

several feet down, I should think ; now it is quite covered. I could touch the water now with my foot, and it is coming up higher and higher every minute."

Lucy again stopped. When she resumed, her voice trembled slightly, and she paused occasionally between the sentences. "Go now, Mr. Harcourt; may God bless and protect you. I am a weak, erring girl, but my prayers, such as they are, will be with you to the last; may you be very, very happy. And give my love to dear old Aunt, and do not let her grieve for me; I wish I was more worthy to be taken, but I trust very humbly in One who can make me so. And give my love to old Jenkin, and the farm-women, and — . . . Mr. Harcourt, there is one thing I much wish to say, but I hardly know how ; I never could have breathed it at any other time. I am afraid I have never made my mother love me ; I am afraid she dislikes me for some reason, I do not know why ; and these last few months I have thought so more than ever ; she has had a good deal of vexation lately, and perhaps I was too inconsiderate when she was troubled and annoyed. Should you ever see her, Mr. Harcourt, and should she ask for me, tell her that I died loving her, as I have always done, oh ! very, very dearly,

and that I ask her forgiveness, and that of all the world, for what I have done wrong. And now leave me, please, Mr. Harcourt; once more, may God bless you. Do not stop, please; I would rather you did not see it, and I shall feel happy to know that you are in safety. Do not stay, Mr. Harcourt; I would rather not speak or think more of this world now; it will soon be over." And Lucy knelt on the ledge, covering her face with one hand; the other arm was bent upwards and the hand pressed to the throat, while her riding-hat, which she had previously loosened, had now fallen to the ground beside her, and allowed her long fair hair to stream over her shoulders like the representations of a Magdalene.

Harcourt had uttered no sound while Lucy was speaking: at first he seemed absorbed in mute grief; latterly, he had roused himself, and had been scanning the fissure with close attention. He had now made up his mind, apparently, as to the feasibility of what he proposed; springing forward on the tree, almost as Lucy finished speaking, he lowered himself by its branches, and selecting one which appeared the most healthy and vigorous, descended almost to its extremity; between which and the broad ledge or platform on which Lucy knelt there was an interval,

probably, of some twelve feet. It was just possible that by dropping from the bough Harcourt might reach this; and, with a half-muttered prayer, "Oh, my God! if it may be, to save her; if not, let us perish together," he swung loose from the tree, hanging by one arm, and prepared for the perilous leap. Much to Harcourt's surprise, the branch on which his weight was thus thrown bore down almost to the level of the platform; no spring was necessary; and stepping easily upon the rock, (the bough still remaining in his hand with much less resistance than he could have expected from its apparent elasticity), he found himself at Lucy's side. Instantly, like the flash of a meteor, the hope, the faint hope, of escape rushed into his mind: "If Lucy could ascend by the tree!" Strangely enough, the latter seemed almost to lend its aid, like an animate being, to their deliverance; the bough which Harcourt held now followed his hand without difficulty; it would be perfectly easy for him to draw it down, so as to allow of Lucy climbing upon it: once on the top of the crag, above the bare scarp, and she might ascend as he had done by the creepers! It was very precarious; but how far preferable to the certain doom of their present position. Half a dozen words sufficed to explain the whole to Lucy, who had risen

to her feet at the sound of Harcourt's descent. She added her slight force to his in pulling the stout limb towards them; again it yielded with comparatively little pressure. Under other circumstances Harcourt might have felt some misgiving from this; but in his highly-strung condition of mind and nerve, he could not balance presumptions accurately: the succour had come too suddenly and opportunely to allow of his doubting its reality. Stooping down, with one hand he drew the bough, still strangely ductile, close to the ledge; with the other he was about to assist Lucy to mount, when, with the swiftness of thought, the huge limb slid away from his grasp into the gulf of water beneath, the rest of the tree following and carrying away with it a mass of stones and rubbish from the detached crag. The pressure of Harcourt's weight on the tree, aided by its singular position in the fissure, had loosened the frail hold of its roots, and the bridge that was to have borne them to the living world now swam helplessly on the torrent. The fall of such a body in the water was sufficient to throw a wave of considerable size on the left bank, the rebound of which on the right dashed with force upon the rock on which Harcourt and Lucy stood, but without injuring them; while the risk which might have ensued

from the rubbish brought down by the falling tree had been obviated by the sharp inward slant of the lower part of the rock.

And now, indeed, all hope was gone, and it remained to meet the last enemy that shall assail man's race, as the quick-throbbing human heart best might. It was indeed death in its most awful form. More slowly now, but still gradually and surely, as if sporting with their suspense, the water climbed the steep side of the platform where Lucy and Harcourt stood; their prison-house now, and soon to be their grave. Outside the fissure, the torrent rushed by in its sturdy strength; less fiercely, indeed, now to the eye, so that at one time Harcourt almost thought there might be some hope of life in its waters. But at that instant the carcase of some horned animal, surprised probably by the flood in one of the low pastures by the river, floated, or rather flew past them, spinning and twirling round and round like a cork ball in the restless eddies, and hurried down with a violence which no human arm could stem or direct, to the brink of the lower fall. Here it paused, perhaps for five seconds, and then dashed with a giddy reel and plunge over the precipice. Lucy shuddered so much at the sight, that her companion led her into the interior

of the fissure or cavern ; indeed, this had become necessary now, for the water had actually reached the platform, and its outer edge, where it joined the bare rock, was already covered ; it sloped, however, slightly, very slightly—perhaps about half a foot in the whole, in an upward direction towards the interior ; and Harcourt, determined not to throw away wilfully any chance of life, placed Lucy at the extreme end of this slope, which the water could not reach for some minutes longer, himself standing by her side, nearer to the entrance. Had Harcourt been alone, he would have preferred plunging boldly into the sea of waters, and meeting his death amidst their wild dash and roar ; indeed, Lucy herself had intimated some wish of the kind ; but the sight they had just witnessed sent such a palpable shudder through her frame, that Harcourt did not hesitate to draw her inwards, nor did she now resist. And where she was, in life or death, there he must now be also.

On, on crept the long minutes ; as it seemed, interminably long ; nearer and nearer came the never-pausing waters ; higher and higher they clomb from crevice to crevice of the dull stone, scaling with eager step the defenceless citadel of life. It was very terrible. Mingling with the din and turmoil

without, was the gurgling and plashing of the insidious foe, as it wound its way into the more concealed fissures of the rock, spouting and streaming over in tiny jets on the outside, as it won its footing in each fresh cavity. The cavern, too, was intensely hot, both from the general sultriness of the air, and the confined space in which Lucy and Harcourt now stood; while a thick murk, a darkness that might be felt, reigned in the interior, the clouds having once again rolled up (portending a third storm) over the external scene, and thus diminished the little light which at any time found its way into the further extremity of the fissure. In one place only a tiny ray, admitted probably through some cleft in the rock overhead, pierced the deep gloom which occupied the rest of the cavern; it caught Lucy's attention, and she looked up; it was streaming full on Harcourt's face, which it made distinctly visible. The face was turned towards her, bending upon the dim outline of her figure a gaze of unspeakable tenderness and pity, which even in that hour sent a thrill as of a new existence through Lucy's whole heart and frame. Yes, in life's last agony, she read its conquering mystery of love: that which water shall not drown, nor fire scorch out of man's soul; the germ of his new creation, the keynote of

Heaven's harmonies ; the divinely-given talisman which shall guide His erring creatures to the home of the Universal Father.

And now the moment was indeed come. The water had risen much above Harcourt's knees ; his utmost care could not prevent its gaining fast upon the pale shrinking form beside him. One brief prayer to the Invisible ; one struggle of the weary breath ; once to be endured meekly that wrench of soul and body asunder ; and earth, with all its hopes and cares, would have passed away for ever. But it was not to be.

CHAP. VIII.

“ For though to man’s dull spirit
And the five weak ports of sense,
There seem such obdurate things on earth
As bar intelligence ;
Yet earth and air, fire, water,
And the clouds and rolling sea,
Hard trunks, and bare sun-trodden cliffs,
All natural shapes that be,
Are but inferior workmen,
And in death or extreme pain
Show oftentimes, to good men’s eyes
Ministering our gain; — ”

CORY.

SIDE to side, roof to floor, crevice to crevice of that dark cavern, all suddenly gleaming, as it were instinct, with bright dazzling light, so instantaneous and yet so intense that it seemed almost to lend the mind its own subtle power, and enable it to trace by one operation of the senses every stone, every seam, every object, the tiniest, the dimmest, the most remote, the most inconsiderable in that chamber of death ! Roaring overhead — the intolerable wailing rush of the torrent seemed silenced now — grounding, hurtling, crashing with a din which made even the hard

rock quiver under its force ; — that prolonged chaos of sound, the disruption, as it were, of organic nature, so near, so appalling ; — whence was it ?

Verily to man in his extreme need, sometimes the tiny insect bringeth succour ; sometimes the armies of Heaven are commanded to do him service. The fresh storm which had been impending, had at last burst forth with still greater violence than those which had preceded it. Attracted, doubtless, by the turret-like projection on its top, the electric fluid had struck the detached crag which, the reader will probably recollect, intervened between the fissure where Lucy and Harcourt stood, and the steep but not impassable slope down which the latter had descended on his way to the cavern. The huge rock, already inclined at a considerable angle towards the stream, and retaining only a slight adhesion to the main cliff of which it had originally formed part ; — undermined too, as was probable, at the present time, by the action of the torrent at its base, as well as shaken by the fall of the tree, — seemed to stagger under the blow of its invisible assailant. For a moment it stood its ground ; then it tottered, rocked, bowed forwards ; and at length, with a convulsive heave and throe, and a hard grating sound, followed by the dull roar of a falling body of great size, and

a terrific plash as it touched the water, the whole huge mass plunged into the stream. All that we have narrated, from the first flash of lightning to the fall of the rock, took place in much less than a minute; and yet in that short space, terrified, bewildered, almost stupified as they were with the noise and light, Lucy and Harcourt with a burst of thankfulness saw that escape was within their reach. "The gates of brass were broken, and the bars of iron rent in sunder." In one rapid glance, notwithstanding the dust and spray that had accompanied the fall, they took in the whole scene before them; their position on the open face of the cliff, the clouds, the uninterrupted view of distant objects, the free breath of heaven in their faces; above all, close to them, almost within touch, and easily accessible over the shattered rock which had formed the base of the crag which had hitherto barred their exit, the green friendly slope of the river bank. One instant, we have said, sufficed to show them this; the next warned them that they were not yet safe. The word rose to both their lips, almost at the same time — "The back wave!" Instantly Harcourt encircled his companion with his arm, straining her close and firmly to his breast; no less firmly he planted his back against the rock behind him,

thrusting at the same time his disengaged hand into one of the numerous crevices of what had lately been the cavern. It is impossible to convey in words any idea of the rapid succession of all these events: the lightning, the fall of the cliff, Harcourt's action were really almost simultaneous; and close upon them came the sound of the displaced water impinging upon the opposite shore. Neither Lucy nor Harcourt dared to watch its return; it came but too soon. High up over their heads, sending its spray almost to the point where the rock had separated, foamed and roared a wave of prodigious size; there was stifling and suffocation in its embrace. Its descent was still more frightful; hardly could Harcourt, with the exertion of his utmost strength, maintain his position on the rock from the deadly wrench of the water as it washed down the cliff's side, almost snapping his arm as he held tight on to the crevice. Short as the time really was, it seemed hours; every instant he felt as if the struggle was fruitless, and he must yield. But the wave retired as it had come, and those whom it had threatened to engulf were still where it had found them.

We must pass rapidly over the rest of this memorable day. It often happens, after an escape from

great peril, that the place of safety presents obstacles and difficulties which we had overlooked at a time when it would have seemed unspeakable happiness to have had even the glimpse of reaching it. Accordingly, Harcourt found that his task in conducting his fair charge (now utterly faint and exhausted with the reaction from the late scene) up the steep declivity of the right bank, and from thence across the broken rocks and underwood into the road, was far more difficult than he could have supposed possible ; poor Lucy did her very best, but the exertion proved almost too much for the overtasked energies both of herself and her conductor. Soon after reaching the road, however, they were happily overtaken by a market-cart, the driver of which readily undertook to convey them to Plas Newydd, where they found the household already in commotion at their long absence, and the violence of the storm which had raged for so many hours ; although Aunt Witherby, with a consideration which might be judiciously imitated by others of her sex, postponed the scolding which Lucy and Harcourt felt was certainly not unmerited until the next morning, when the influence of an evening's rest and refreshment, (under which both culprits seemed gradually to recover all their faculties except that of

speech), appeared to indicate that it might be administered without the apprehension of serious consequences.

Of the deeper emotions with which Lucy and Harcourt found themselves in safety that day after what had passed, it perhaps befits us not to speak in our idle tale. Certainly, their deliverance from an imminent and fearful danger did not sit lightly on the hearts of either. But the sacred fountain of faith and gratitude wells forth in depths unnoted by the eye of man; and the bashful nymph will retire scared from the rude approach, which, either to gratify some morbid curiosity, or to parade the phraseology of a wordy cant, would press too closely on its retreat.

Among the associations of a character more open to the chronicler, perhaps not the least interesting (exclusive, of course, of certain thrilling sensations in the young hearts which had shared such peril side by side, of which we may be called upon to speak at more length hereafter), was an incident which befell the old Welsh groom and man-of-all-work, Jenkin. Bitterly and sorely had that faithful adherent bewailed the loss of poor Taffy, who, it was evident to the apprehension of everybody, must have been carried away in the inundation, which had co-

vered the banks of the river to a height far above that of the spot where he had been tethered.

The reader may judge, therefore, of the surprise and delight of old Jenkin, when, after a protracted lamentation over the untimely end of his deceased helpmate, and upon entering the stable which had been the customary abode of the latter, with some vague intention — (Jenkin would not have known what a “cenotaph” meant, but he had a notion in his unsophisticated brain which was quite equivalent) — with some vague idea of doing honour to the deceased, perhaps shedding genuine tears to his memory on the scene of his earthly sojourn, he saw that illustrious quadruped in a highly flourishing state of health, with his head deeply immersed in the manger, endeavouring to solace himself for an enforced abstinence of some hours with such fragments of his morning’s refection as still lingered in the trough. The only misadventure apparent on Taffy or his accoutrements was in the bridle, which was found to have been broken; a circumstance which, coupled with the well-known disposition of the animal in question, led eventually to the conclusion that, having discovered some provender of a more attractive character at a distance from the place where he had been tethered, he had gone in

quest of it ; thus saving himself from the peril to which he would otherwise have been exposed, and probably returning home when the process of digestion had reached a point which made a little gentle exercise not unacceptable. Taffy's reappearance in the stable was a matter of no difficulty, as it was not the least remarkable of his accomplishments that for some years past he had always superseded old Jenkin's attentions in that particular by lifting the latch of the door himself.

CHAP. IX.

"Oh ! when the breeze is sighing,
When the herd is lying
 In the hollow dell beneath the hawthorn tree;
And when the wandering plover
Skims the moorland over,
 And the white gull floats upon the golden sea ;
And when the heart of love
Is in the heaven above,
 And in the murmuring waves and the deep sunlit bay ; —
With thee, my spirit's being,
Hearing thee, and seeing,
 I would rove the livelong summer day.

"And when the skies were waning,
And the dew came raining
 With a sound of fragrance on the glades all green ;
And with the lone bird's singing
Every dell was ringing,
 And the forest oaks their glimmering boughs between ;
Beneath the soft blue light
Of the unchanging night,
 With thee I'd watch the trembling stars that shine ;
And in their gaze of gladness
I would read but sadness,
 To the deeper, holier joy of thine."

WHITLOCK.

IN compliance with Mrs. Witherby's urgent request,
Lucy Akehurst did not make her appearance in the

drawing-room until the forenoon of Thursday was somewhat advanced, although she had not herself happily experienced either fatigue or any other ill results from the exciting occurrences of the previous day. But although Lucy resumed her usual seat and work, there was something in her manner and look which Mrs. Witherby, who, with her usual kindness of intention, scrutinised her niece's demeanour very closely to ascertain that she was not the worse for the peril which she had so recently escaped, seemed to consider far from satisfactory. As Harcourt was in the room also, the reader, although he will, we are sure, acquit our favourite Lucy of anything like coquetry or assumed bashfulness, may perhaps find the monosyllables in which she replied to her aunt's questions, and the persevering devotion to her work which the young lady also exhibited on this occasion, her long eyelashes declining on the fair young cheeks as if they were endeavouring to hide a certain heightened colour with which it was from time to time tinged, less inexplicable than they appeared to that most unsuspecting *chaperon*. What further increased Mrs. Witherby's perplexity, was that Harcourt, on whom she had always reckoned as such a chatty and animated companion on these occasions, was now almost

as unsociable as Lucy. Instead of talking, he held a book in his hand, of which he occasionally turned the pages, but with such an evident absence of interest and even of respectful attention to his author, that the unobservant Mrs. Witherby herself was compelled to wonder whether, if interrogated upon the subject of his studies, he could have given an account of the consecutive contents of any two sentences. After some cogitation upon this state of things in her own mind, it at last occurred to Mrs. Witherby, that such an alteration in the demeanour of her companions must be attributable to the imminent risk and terror of the preceding day, which indeed, upon reflection, she could not but feel was calculated to have left in their minds sensations of gloom and uneasiness, even when the actual causes of apprehension were removed. With the benevolent desire, accordingly, of dispelling these emotions, Mrs. Witherby commenced a bantering conversation with the young people, as she termed them, in a tone of briskness and animation, very different to her usual quiet style of discourse. Finding that her attempts were unsuccessful (for Harcourt, with his utmost politeness, could not, on the present occasion, bring himself to respond as he ought to have done to the playful irony and sprightly rallies of the

good lady), Mrs. Witherby, still fearing, as before, that they were allowing the recent adventure to prey unduly upon their spirits, became quite warm in her denunciation of the unusual abstraction and dullness of her companions. "Never before did I meet with two such stupid people as you both are to-day; as to you, Lucy, you have done nothing but sit doking, doking away with your needle ever since you came into the room; you have even infected Mr. Harcourt, who seems to have neither voice nor wits left this morning; why, one would fancy you were both in love."

Lucy had to bend her head very closely over her work now; the tell-tale colour rose up high in her cheek, mantling even the exquisitely fair forehead with a glow which certainly had no business there. Mrs. Witherby continued,—

"Well now, I've made up my mind, if you do not intend to be more pleasant and agreeable than you have been for the last hour or two, you shall not stop indoors; I won't keep such stupid people in the parlour. Do go out for a walk somewhere, and get back your spirits, which I am sure (for I am only laughing at you), you *had* quite enough to disturb yesterday. Why do you not take Mr. Harcourt, Lucy, to that old farm-house which Jenkin was

telling us of the other day, where there are the ruins of the monastery ; Tyn-y-groes, I think, he called it ? Jenkin said it was only a few fields off, and it would be just the walk to do you good this lovely morning. I would come with you myself, but there are these dusters and tray-cloths" (the good lady had accumulated an ominous-looking heap in front of her on her first entrance, which, in fact, accounted for the unusually long morning visit she had paid the drawing-room), "and I *must* finish marking them before luncheon. So pray go out and enjoy yourselves."

"Anything is better," thought Lucy, "than to run the gauntlet of dear Aunt Witherby's fire of questions and comments any longer." At the same time Harcourt rose, and accosting Lucy with as sheepish an air as a schoolboy soliciting a partner's hand for the next dance, timidly asked, "Will you come, Miss Akehurst?" Lucy assented, and, after some brief inquiries as to the way, they turned their footsteps to Tyn-y-groes accordingly.

The cluster of houses which bore this name (importing in English "the houses of the Cross") consisted of a farm of some size, with a few labourers' cottages adjoining. The ruins of which Mrs. Witherby had spoken were very inconsiderable ; in fact, the

only remains of the old monastery which at the time we write of could be identified with any certainty, were two ivy-grown fragments of the church, originally part of the south transept, but which were then and now included in the area of the farm buildings. The site of the rest of the church might be traced in a green meadow in the rear of the farm, where, in dry weather, the foundations were clearly distinguishable in brown lines upon the turf. The spot itself was one of great beauty, immediately overhung by a steep craggy hill of some height, and approached by an avenue of oaks, which might have been almost coeval with the ruined fabric itself. On one side of the farm lay what appeared to have been the fishpond of the monks, now, however, almost choked up, the brick margin which had formerly enclosed it having crumbled away in many places, and a thick growth of flags and underwood encroached upon its surface. A mossy green path, however, still ran round it on one side, terminating in a doorway in the wall by which the pond was still partially enclosed.

Harcourt felt some curiosity to ascertain where this doorway led, and, accompanied by Lucy, skirted the neglected pool, which had doubtless furnished many a welcome addition to the monks' Lenten fare, and

pulled the string which communicated with the latch on the other side. The door obeyed the summons, and opening, gave admission to a spot which, although its features were on a small scale, possessed considerable attraction from its singular beauty and seclusion. This was the conduit, or enclosed spring, from which the stream that had formerly supplied the fishpond issued forth, passing under a small arch in the wall into the interior. The water was exquisitely clear and cold, welling out at the foot of a rock overhung with trees, from which it flowed into a square stone basin some foot or two in depth, and protected by a roof, for the accommodation of the numerous visitors who had in the flourishing days of the monastery resorted to the spring; the latter being of great celebrity for its healing qualities, and supposed to be endowed, in some instances, with miraculous powers. The rude seats which had once surrounded the basin were now in great measure decayed, but enough of them still remained to form a convenient resting place; and as Lucy appeared fatigued, even with the short walk they had taken, Harcourt urged her to rest for a few minutes on one of the least shattered benches, near the opening of the small chamber which enclosed the well. Lucy complied with the request, and Harcourt himself re-

mained on the outside, where he stood for some minutes, apparently watching the tiny rill of water as it emerged from its artificial receptacle, and trickled gently towards the arch of which we have already spoken. In reality, however, Harcourt's whole frame was quivering with emotions which almost forbade utterance. He could not but feel that the moment was now come in which the decisive words *must* be uttered; and although he struggled with the agitation which choked his voice and almost breath as puerile and unworthy, it was still several minutes before he could acquire the composure which he felt to be necessary for the occasion. All around was peace and repose, offering the greatest possible contrast to the conflict of the elements, which at nearly the same hour the day before had appeared to threaten himself and his companion with destruction. Without being oppressive, the morning was clear and summer-like; the healing water rippled with a low murmur at their feet; the buzz of insects, the tinkling of the sheep-bells on the distant hills, the gentle stir of a light breeze in the crisp oak leaves overhead, scarcely broke the general stillness, although it prevented its being sombre and inanimate; the bright sunshine, admitted here and there through some opening in the

trees which protected their retreat, lay in long streaks on the mossy turf; while a wavy mountain outline on the horizon, partially seen behind the oak avenue in front, slumbered peacefully under the unclouded sky. Harcourt turned at length, and leaning with one arm on the edge of the decayed stonework above Lucy's seat, allowed his gaze to rest fixedly and earnestly on the fair young face at his side. For one moment his eye met Lucy's. Again she read in it the same thought of her, the same deep-seated *love*, which she had observed the day before, although its general character was somewhat changed, and instead of the compassionate look it had then worn, it was now clouded with an expression of intense suffering and dejection.

Harcourt had, indeed, as had been frequently the case of late, passed an almost sleepless night; incessantly his thoughts travelled over and over again the momentous occurrences of the day, dwelling more than all on some of Lucy's expressions to himself at the time of their adventure, especially on the words she had used when she implored him to leave her, "she should feel happy to know that he was in safety." Overnight, Harcourt had dwelt upon these words with a brighter augury for his hopes than he had allowed himself yet to entertain; but the morn-

ing had dissipated this illusion, and the reaction of feeling was proportionably great in consequence. Never, probably, had Harcourt felt more inclined to despair than at the moment which was now finally to decide his fate.

Lucy was herself the first to speak. The deep dejection expressed in Harcourt's face had so touched her, that in her weak state, agitated both by the exciting events of the day before and the uncontrollable emotions of the present moment, the tears involuntarily sprang to her eyes. She turned her head hastily to one side to conceal them, and added, in as indifferent a tone as she could assume, "You still think of leaving us on Monday, Mr. Harcourt?"

The words were spoken almost at random, the first that rose to Lucy's lips, being in fact only intended as a screen to the emotion which she feared Harcourt could not but notice; but if she had spent hours in their selection, she could not have chosen better. Harcourt paused a moment, and replied in a tone which he in vain endeavoured to steady, "No, Miss Akehurst, I am afraid I must leave to-day, this afternoon, in fact, as soon as I can say good-bye to your aunt. I have arranged every thing for the purpose. Miss Akehurst," Harcourt continued, "I had hoped that before leaving I should

find some opportunity for speaking to you like the present. I have something to confess; something which I fear even your gentleness can hardly pardon, and yet I cannot leave it unsaid. You do not know, you never could guess, Miss Akehurst, how presumptuous I have been, what feelings I have dared to cherish during the last few weeks; yes, that I have even dared to love you, blindly, passionately. Alas! how could it be otherwise? Thrown into your society, seeing you, hearing you, hour by hour, day by day, how *could* I help the deepest, most passionate heart-worship of one so lovely, so good, so matchless? Miss Akehurst," Harcourt added, after a further slight pause, "this is great madness; but I could not leave you without confessing my folly; now I have done it, and have only to bear through life, as I best may, the penalty of my error. Were I, indeed, in a different position, and not the obscure man I am, with my own way to make, although I should still be utterly unworthy of such a prize, I might perhaps have ventured to think its attainment not impossible. Something tells me, Miss Akehurst, that in many respects (although it seems most presumptuous to say it), that in many respects we might not be wholly unsuited to each other; that we share the same love of all that is beautiful in art and na-

ture, the same hopes, the same aspirations. But this is all madness; I must tear such visions from my heart, although it is the bitterness of death to do it. Pardon me, Miss Akehurst, if you can. I will promise not again to annoy you by recurring to the subject. I shall leave Plas Newydd, as I said, this afternoon, and it is wholly improbable that we should ever meet again; may you be happy, very happy, as you deserve. Yes, gladly would I brook the pain of it, to hear that you *were* happily united to one who could appreciate and cherish the rich treasure he had won. Perhaps, Miss Akehurst, in after years you will think sometimes of our mountain rambles together." And with these words poor Harcourt, unable longer to maintain the air of assumed calmness in which he had lately spoken, turned towards the wall on which he had been leaning, and buried his face in his hands, his chest and whole frame heaving with uncontrollable emotion.

And then it was that, softly and sweetly, amid the rippling waters, the rustling leaves, the hum and stir of insect wings, a tremulous and very low but clear voice, murmured at Harcourt's side, "I shall never love any other than you."

Harcourt turned towards the speaker with almost a greater revulsion of feeling than he had experienced

in the cavern the day before. "Miss Akehurst," he cried impetuously, "Lucy, dearest Lucy, speak again; it is life and death to me; speak again, angel, speak, Lucy; say you can, you do love me, you will be mine, my very, very own."

Lucy did not speak, but she turned her eyes towards Harcourt brimming with tears, but with the imperishable light of happy unconcealed love beaming underneath. It was quite answer enough. With one long, passionate embrace, Harcourt strained the fair trembling girl to his bosom, and sealed on her lips the unspoken betrothal of two hearts that in life or death should never be henceforth but as one.

We regret greatly to inform the reader, that for the second day running (a most unprecedented occurrence at Plas Newydd) Mrs. Witherby had to wait luncheon, while the moss-grown stones and bubbling fountains of the old well heard the impassioned pleading tones of Harcourt's voice, as he sat at Lucy's feet, half doubting his own happiness, and from time to time gazing up, as Harcourt *could* gaze, into the sweet face above him, as if to satisfy himself again and again by his scrutiny, that what had occurred was not a dream; while again and again, as he apparently became convinced of its reality, he covered the white hand, which Lucy after a little

demur abandoned to him, with passionate kisses, and murmured forth his happiness and love. And then they talked, as the young and guileless only may in those first hours of unchecked confidence, of the chequered past and bright future ; of the dream-life of their own hearts ; of the scenes and thoughts they had shared together, now invested as it were with a new atmosphere of light ; of the dawning hopes and emotions, the hoarded treasures of a first love, hitherto almost undivulged even to their own thoughts, but which now framed themselves, bashfully and timidly, into mutual confession and avowal. Verily, the birds *might* carol their sweetest, the sunshine smile its brightest, the brook flow by with its most joyous murmur, for the heart's bridal of the unpolluted, the plighted troth of two congenial and matchless souls.

At length Lucy peremptorily insisted on a return home ; indeed, the reader who is disposed to complain of the prolongation of the foregoing conference, after what had taken place, must please distinctly to understand that the young lady was in no way responsible for its duration. Happily and mirthfully, now that the agitation of the morning had subsided into feelings which allowed of a less sedate demeanour, they walked over the meadows which they had trod a few hours previously with far different

sensations. As a proof that one of the party, at least, had recovered somewhat from the absorbing emotions which had occupied her during the forenoon, we may observe that, as she fled upstairs on entering the house, Miss Lucy Akehurst had the impertinence to lean over the banisters (how bright the old staircase looked *to-day*) and inquire, *sotto voce*, "Do you still think of leaving this afternoon, Mr. Harcourt?"

Having disposed of this inquiry, Harcourt, as in duty bound, proceeded to break the news to Mrs. Witherby, whom he found seated in the drawing-room. Harcourt first apologised for having kept the good lady waiting for luncheon. Mrs. Witherby took out her watch, and expressed surprise that it was so late; she had really not felt at all hungry. "But we will go in now," she added, "as *you* must be glad of something after your walk."

"I fear, Mrs. Witherby," answered Harcourt, "that I must still request leave to detain you for five minutes' conversation. The fact is, Mrs. Witherby, a very important circumstance has occurred, of which it is only due to your kindness to apprise you without delay. Mrs. Witherby, I am the happiest of men; I have won the very brightest and best treasure that earth has to bestow."

"Indeed, Mr. Harcourt?" said the old lady; "no one will rejoice more in any good fortune of yours than myself; but I am quite at a loss to think what discoveries you can have made in your walk to Tyn-y-groes."

"The discovery of two worlds," answered Harcourt, so impetuously, that he almost made his auditor jump. "But I beg ten thousand pardons, Mrs. Witherby," added Harcourt; "I dare say you think me crazy" (which, indeed, was not far from the truth); "but I know you will forgive me when you know the cause. Mrs. Witherby, I am proud to say, I have won your niece's love; I have heard it to-day from her own lips."

"*My* niece; what niece?"

"Why, who can you suppose, Mrs. Witherby? I don't think even you can have two such nieces as Miss Lucy Akehurst."

"My niece Lucy, Mr. Harcourt? Why she is a mere baby; my niece Lucy in love?"

"Well, my dear Madam, you must ask herself about that," replied Harcourt. "I can hardly think such a piece of good fortune real myself, but still it certainly is the fact that we are engaged; and if a whole life's devotion can in any way repay her for this great boon of her love, I will undertake, for my

part, that it shall not be wanting. I need not say," continued Harcourt (for his listener was still too much wrapt in astonishment to make any answer), "that I shall at once communicate with Miss Akehurst's mother, and entreat her sanction to our engagement. Meanwhile, you will perhaps not object to my retracting my intention of leaving next Monday, and continuing your guest here until Mrs. Akehurst's reply is received."

"Most certainly," answered Mrs. Witherby, who had at length recovered her voice; "you know what pleasure your society has always given me, and I shall find it, you may be sure, still more agreeable under existing circumstances; that is to say, if you young people have any time or conversation to spare for an old woman like myself. Indeed, Mr. Harcourt," added the genial old lady, "I beg to assure you that your intelligence, now I have recovered from the surprise of it, has given me unaffected pleasure. I think that you and Lucy are exactly suited for each other, and I have no doubt that her mamma will be as much delighted as myself. But dear, dear; how strangely things do come about in this world. To think that Lucy Akehurst should have gone and fallen in love; actually, too, under my very eyes, and yet never to have told me a word about it!"

Harcourt's promised letter to Mrs. Akehurst was of course accompanied by one from Lucy. As Mrs. Witherby expressed her intention of adding a third, which, she intimated, would convey to Mrs. Akehurst her cordial approval of her daughter's choice, the two epistles (which could not leave before the Saturday) were sealed and entrusted to her, to forward under a common enclosure with her own. We will not weary the reader with the details of this correspondence, which always, perhaps, under such circumstances, partakes somewhat of the character of the model letter-writer, and may easily be recalled by those who have undertaken a similar composition, or guessed by those who have not. It is of more consequence to apprise the reader that no reply to this joint communication reached Plas Newydd for upwards of ten days. In part this delay was owing to the postal arrangements in that remote locality, which, as we have already intimated, were highly fluctuating and uncertain; but a still more satisfactory reason for it will be found in a singular misadventure which befell Mrs. Witherby. That excellent lady, having completed her letter of congratulation according to promise, placed it in an envelope already addressed to Mrs. Akehurst, and proceeded upstairs to fetch Harcourt and Lucy's

letters, which were locked up in her wardrobe. As usual, the elaborate nature of Mrs. Witherby's communication had driven things over the usual post-time; and as she had received more than one intimation that the messenger could wait no longer, she hastily, on returning to the drawing-room with the two letters, placed them, as she supposed, inside the envelope; and having sealed and despatched the latter, went about some other occupation. Great was the good lady's surprise and perplexity, when, on opening her writing-case the same evening, she found the envelope addressed to Mrs. Akehurst still lying, with her own note to the latter, inside one of its sheets. The mystery was soon solved. Mrs. Witherby had previously written an order to her Bath mantua-maker for some indispensable articles of female attire; this had been intended to go by the same post, but had been delayed until the following week, for the purpose of enclosing some paper patterns. In Mrs. Witherby's haste, she had, by inadvertence, placed Harcourt and Lucy's notes inside this despatch, and thus it happened that Mrs. Freemantle, in addition to the detailed communication referring to the mysteries of her craft aforesaid, received, much to her astonishment, two beautifully penned notes, addressed respectively to "Mrs. Ake-

hurst " and "To my dearest Mother." Apprehending that there must be some mistake, the milliner returned the two letters to Mrs. Witherby, by whom they were at once forwarded, this time in their proper enclosure, to Mrs. Akehurst. But the result of the accident which had occurred was that, instead of reaching that lady before her marriage to Butler, they only arrived in London upon the day of that auspicious event, and were accordingly forwarded to the continental watering place to which the newly-married couple, as we have already mentioned, had retired for the honeymoon.

And now the reader is aware of the contents of the epistle which Butler, when we were last in his company, perused with such an appearance of satisfaction. His grounds for doing so, which perhaps the reader may even yet be at some loss to discover we must still, we fear, defer laying before him until a future chapter.

CHAP. X.

“And is it thus ? and has the sleep of death
On good Quinctilius cast its leaden chain ?
When, when shall honour and unblemished faith,
With kindred justice find his like again ?”

HOR. Od. i. 24. 25.

THE storm and inundation, from which Harcourt and Lucy had so narrowly escaped, had entailed still more serious injury in other quarters. In some of the more remote parts of the district, several lives had been sacrificed; nearer to Plas Newydd, the damage had been confined to property and farm produce, but with an exception which struck deep sorrow into the hearts of all who heard it. On the morning of the storm, the venerable rector of Llanfihangel had gone on foot to visit a sick parishioner at some distance. On his return, which took place after the first violence of the storm had subsided, the old man had nearly reached his own home, when on arriving at a spot about half a mile from the village, where there was a well frequented cattle ford across the Hirnant, with stepping stones

for foot passengers, his attention was arrested by the critical situation of a little boy, the son of one of his parishioners. The Hirnant had not flooded with the violence of the larger river we have described in a previous chapter; still its waters had begun gradually to rise as they always did after rain, and had even converted the ford in question, which was very broad, and in its ordinary state only a few inches deep with a firm gravelly bottom, into a swift and turbid although still shallow current. The child we have mentioned was driving some cattle across the ford from the upland pastures on the opposite side, at the time Mr. Evans reached it by the road. The stepping stones were still passable, and the little fellow marched fearlessly over them, calling to his cows, although in one or two places the water had begun to wash over the edges of the stones. About the middle, however, he made a false step, and losing his balance fell into the stream. For a second or two, he rolled round and round on the pebbly bottom, without being able to recover himself; he then gained his feet, and might have struggled to the bank, although the water was plashing high above his waist, had he not encountered a sudden eddy, which rapidly whirling round, carried him off the shallow level of the ford

into the deep water beyond. It was at this moment that Mr. Evans reached the spot. He instantly saw the child's danger, and without hesitation plunged in to his rescue. Mr. Evans had been a good swimmer in his youth, but long out of practice; and the current in the centre of the stream to which the child had been carried was so rapid, that it was only with extreme difficulty and exertion that his deliverer was able to extricate him from his perilous position. The little fellow was too much exhausted to walk, and Mr. Evans assisted him with his arm until they reached the farm at which his parents resided, which unhappily was nearly a mile from the spot where the accident occurred. It was found that the lad had sustained no injury beyond his fright and temporary immersion; and a night's rest, with a sound scolding for his carelessness, quickly restored matters in this quarter. To his benevolent deliverer the consequences were more serious. Mr. Evans found it impossible to touch the frugal dinner which had been awaiting his return home; he felt shivered and restless, and at length, at his housekeeper's urgent entreaties, consented to retire to bed, although it was still early in the afternoon. The old man never again quitted it. In the course of the evening, an attack of fever set in, the result of

the unusual exertion and exposure to wet which he had undergone ; and the report of the medical man who had been sent for in disregard of Mr. Evans's injunction to the contrary, and who was the same who had attended Harcourt a few weeks previously, was any thing but favourable. On the following morning, the symptoms still continued, and were attended with racking pains in the limbs, and an entire prostration of strength, which seemed to increase every hour. Towards the afternoon the doctor arrived again, and found his patient evidently fast sinking ; without any actual disorder sufficient to threaten life, the constitution had received a shock, which at Mr. Evans's advanced age seemed to preclude all hope of recovery.

It was not until the day succeeding the scene with Lucy at Tyn y Groes, that Harcourt heard of his friend's danger. The news was brought by some of the country people the next morning ; and as Harcourt, after swallowing a hurried breakfast, was hastening to Llanfihangel, no less by Lucy's desire than his own, to ascertain how things actually stood, he was met by a lad from the village (the same that he had seen on the day of the Methodist's procession), who had been despatched by Mr. Evans to request he would come and see him.

When Harcourt entered the poorly furnished, but neat and scrupulously clean room in which Mr. Evans lay, he saw that the unfavourable news of the morning had not been exaggerated. In the short interval which had elapsed since the accident, the noble but gentle features of the old man had begun to exhibit that alteration which so clearly indicates the approach of the last enemy. The cheeks had sunk, and were preternaturally wan and hollow; the faint smile with which he endeavoured to greet his young visitor, although kindly as ever, played upon the pale lips as if it no longer belonged to them; the eyes even had lost the fire of their Celtic extraction, which his seventy years had not dimmed, and were now expressive only of pain and fatigue. The voice, however, was still strong; and Mr. Evans having touched Harcourt's hand with his own, which lay outside the coverlet, and had been feebly turning the pages of a book on his entrance, apologised for having sent for him, and said that he had a favour to request. "I feel, Mr. Harcourt," he said, "that I am on my death bed, and I am anxious to have nothing left on my mind which may interfere with the preparation with which, as it has pleased God in His mercy still to leave me in my senses, I could wish to meet that solemn change. I know no one

else to whom I can communicate what I have to say so well as yourself, and this must be my excuse for troubling you."

Harcourt warmly answered the old man that he might command his services to the utmost, and added a hope, which he was far from feeling, that the danger might be less imminent than Mr. Evans supposed.

"Nay, my young friend," answered Mr. Evans, "there is something within me which tells me better than that. Indeed, I would fain have stayed a little while longer with my poor people here, but if it be God's will, as I can plainly see it is, that I should go, I desire to obey it in all humility. And, perhaps, it is even best so; for there are dark times coming on the Church, and strange forms of error springing up on all sides of her, and I have not now strength and health to cope with them as I once had. God, if He shall see fit, will send some younger and abler hand to do His work in my place. But I must not trespass longer upon your time, Mr. Harcourt; indeed, my own breath seems to fail me at times. My object in sending to you, was to request your kind aid on behalf of a lad whom you have seen occasionally at the parsonage; the same, in fact, who brought the message to you this morning. The

name by which he goes here is Philip Bright; it is not his *real* name, but the latter, as well as his motives for assuming it, are a secret which I have promised him not to divulge. I am only at liberty to tell you, that he is a stranger here, the native of a distant county in England. A dreadful accident, of which he was the immediate cause, without, I hope, more criminality attaching to him than his own impetuosity and unbridled temper, compelled him to leave his birthplace; and by a singular combination of circumstances, he ultimately reached this remote parish. I found him quite destitute, and as he appeared both active and intelligent, I have employed him for various purposes in which he could make himself useful, amongst others, for assisting to teach in the school. Had I lived, I think it likely that he would soon have obtained the mastership, as our present schoolmaster is old, and we are always glad of English teachers. Now, however, he will be left wholly unprovided for. Old Rachel will have what property I possess; it is little enough, although it may suffice for her lifetime. I had always hoped, and indeed tried, to put by money; for it has been the daily wish of my heart, ever since I first came here from college, to restore our old church here, both inside and out, and make it something more like

what a house for God's worship should be ; but somehow, though we have no actual poor here, there was always some one or another wanting help in the parish, and I never found myself a bit richer at the year's end. But I was speaking of this lad. I should be sorry to see him led into bad courses through poverty ; in fact, I think he is qualified to rise into a higher position than that in which he was born, for he has both ability and application. And it has occurred to me that at Oxford, or among some clergymen of your acquaintance, you might be able to do something for him ; it would be a good deed, and would lighten an old man's heart in his last hours."

Harcourt was much affected with the touching simplicity of the speaker's manner and character, and promised readily to do what he asked ; at the same time, with a quivering lip, he inquired whether there was nothing he could do or arrange to promote Mr. Evans's own comfort.

"Thank you, thank you kindly," replied the old man ; "I want for nothing. Indeed, I would gladly tell you, were it otherwise. And now, I believe, I must bid you farewell. May God bless you, my son. You have youth and strength before you, with more than the ordinary prospect, I can well see, of useful and honourable distinction in your career.

Remember only, as the last words of one who has outlived his three score and ten years, that these things can only give lasting happiness, so long as they are employed to the glory of your Creator, and the well-being, in Him and for His sake, of your fellowmen. But, indeed, I believe you already know and think of these things. And now, once more, farewell."

Harcourt's tears fell fast, as he grasped the thin hand which the old man stretched out to him. "I hope I may come to know them," he answered, with an utterance choked with emotion; "at least, it will be my own fault if I do not, when I recollect the bright pattern of them I have seen held out in this place."

"Nay, my son," replied Mr. Evans, "you must look to a far higher pattern than my poor self. I have indeed (as a good man in your Church of England once said) tried to love and serve my Master in youth and age; but every day I have lived has taught me more and more how much we all need His forgiveness, even for our best endeavours; and I am sure mine are no exception. If I do see a brighter and better hope before me, as I seem to do even in the midst of all this weakness, it is when I turn my eyes away from my frail self, and look

to a Higher Worth, to the heaven of an all-pitying love."

Harcourt would fain have lingered in the room, but he feared trespassing upon the old man, who seemed exhausted, and evidently desirous of now being alone. Softly descending the crazy staircase of the cottage, he passed the housekeeper Rachel, who was weeping bitterly and in silence in the kitchen parlour, which had served as the common sitting-room of the household; and with a few words of sympathy to her, closed the door upon the humble home.

The dissolution of its venerable inmate, which took place on the following (or Saturday) morning, was witnessed by no human eye. Harcourt had again called to inquire in the afternoon of the preceding day, but Mr. Evans was then asleep. At a later hour the medical attendant had called, and sat for some time with his patient, whom he left composed, although with an appearance of increased debility. After this, no one saw him alive excepting old Rachel. At her last visit, he insisted on her leaving him for the night, and retiring to rest; he promised to summon her by the handbell at his bedside, if he should want any thing. "But I feel that to-night," he said, "I shall sleep peacefully."

In the morning he was found lying quite dead. But it was not in unconsciousness that the spirit of the old man had passed away. With an effort of remaining strength, he had himself closed his eyes, and placed over his face a clean white napkin, which he had for some hours retained under his pillow, evidently for that purpose. He had then reverently placed his arms in the form of a cross upon his breast, the extremity of each hand resting upon the shoulder opposite. And thus he slept.

CHAP. XI.

"What can it be that strikes so strange a chill
On life's warm pulses, and with ague thrill,
Utters its vague presentiments of ill?"

DUNHAM.

WITH the exception of the sincere grief which both Lucy and Harcourt could not but feel for the loss of one so beloved and respected as the late incumbent of Llanfihangel, the week which ensued upon the occurrences mentioned in our last chapters, passed to them in that cloudless happiness which, if it can come but once in life, is in itself more than a lifetime of delight and joy. No answer, indeed, had yet arrived from Mrs. Akehurst; but this was fully accounted for by Mrs. Witherby's mistake, which, as she feared the young people might be anxious, she confessed with laudable magnanimity, and also by the well-known uncertainties of the post in that district. No drawback was, accordingly, experienced upon this account; and, as Mrs. Witherby was too unselfish, notwithstanding various pretences which she made of keeping up a

great appearance of propriety, to claim any part of the time and attention which she could not but feel would be more happily bestowed elsewhere, Lucy and Harcourt dwelt, as it were, during those halcyon days, in a world of their own, invested with a purer atmosphere, and glowing with perpetual sunshine. It was no longer the rapid interchange of thought, the communication of new and interesting ideas, the admiration, the intellectual skirmishes of jest or argument, which had characterised their earlier intercourse. Deep and subtle, heart beating against heart, life passing into life, it was now the ecstatic dream of love, seeming almost to supersede the necessity of words, and teaching Harcourt, (as he gazed deep down into those clear orbs which Lucy only occasionally now, when his look became too searching, withdrew from him, or laid side by side with his own the fair soft cheek of his affianced bride), revelations of a more transporting joy than he had ever yet drunk from the dancing waters of the torrent, or the golden sunset bathing the mountain peak, — the mystery of an intercommunicable existence, the ascent of spirit with spirit amid the untravelled worlds of space. Every walk, every home scene, every tiny insect, every blade of grass seemed tinged with bright light, and arrayed in beauty as that

which should garnish forth the abode of happy love ; there was mirth in the commonest sounds, lightness and elasticity in the very air they breathed and the ground they trod upon ; there was the knowledge that they were together, that they loved, that their eyes rested on the same objects, their ears drank the same sounds, their hearts beat with the same impulses, hour by hour, unhidden, unrestrained. Oh ! draught of intoxicating joy ! the best that man shall taste in this sterile and cold world ; the last angel presence that still lingers from the Eden of his creation ! Blithely and merrily speed, ye golden hours ; in the crystal goblet bubble high, thou water of joy ! It may not be for ever, but it is fair and glorious, it is God's gift and nature's mystery ; it shall pass, like all of earth, but its record is imperishable in Heaven.

The week drew to its close, unmarked by any occurrence of particular moment, and still without any letter from Mrs. Akehurst. Harcourt had twice seen young Bright, who lodged in a cottage near that of Mr. Evans. After some reflection and examination of the lad's capabilities, Harcourt had arranged a plan which appeared likely to carry out Mr. Evans's kind intentions in his behalf. The question of money matters had barely been referred to by himself and Lucy, but he felt at any rate that

he must now exert himself to the very utmost. His general health had been greatly restored, notwithstanding his accident, by the stay he had made in Wales, but his sight still continued too feeble to allow of his trying it by any undue study; indeed, it seemed as if the excessive use he had made of the organ had in some degree contributed to his illness. Under these circumstances Harcourt decided on engaging Philip Bright as a reader and amanuensis. In the former capacity especially he was likely to prove extremely valuable. Harcourt's studies, in addition to the mere text of the classical authors, necessitated the perusal of a large number of treatises, historical and illustrative, in English; and Philip read, not only with correctness and fluency, but with a delicacy of intonation very unusual in his grade of life, and which was of great importance to an auditor of cultivated tastes. In fact, Harcourt became more and more pleased with what he saw of his *protégé*. There was the same natural refinement in his features and manner which Harcourt had noticed as characterising his voice; and his disposition, although at times marked by the impetuosity to which Mr. Evans had referred, yet in its ordinary moods appeared singularly gentle and considerate of others. Philip appeared anxious to quit Llanfi-

hangel as soon as possible after the funeral, which was fixed for the Saturday morning following that on which Mr. Evans died; and as the Oxford term was now at an end, it was ultimately settled that, on an early day in the week following, the lad should travel by one of the waggons from the neighbouring town to Shrewsbury, and from thence proceed to the village of which Harcourt's father was incumbent, the latter having consented to take charge of him there until his son's return.

The Welsh country funerals are strikingly beautiful, from the homely simplicity of the rustic mourners, and the wild but touching music, in many instances probably of great antiquity, which accompanies the service. On the present occasion a larger concourse than had ever been known in the neighbourhood thronged the humble churchyard of Llanfihangel, and even the small square of the village; those who could not find admittance within its area, standing reverently, with uncovered heads, on the outside. The emotion visible in almost every countenance of these spontaneous mourners, and the deep pathos of the chants and hymns performed by the choir, and echoed back by scores of rich melodious voices, gave unusual interest to the scene, and harmonised well with the solemn beauty

of the grey mountain summits which overhung the lake, and the venerable old church in their hollow. When the coffin which contained the remains of one whose connection with most of those present had more resembled that of a father than any other, was finally hidden from sight, a general burst of grief took place from the large multitude present; and with the feeling of an irreparable loss, which the deep tolling of the bell from the church tower brought home almost personally to each individual, the assembled congregation wended their way sadly and dejectedly along the mountain hollows and glens to their several homes. At the same time the day, which until the close of the ceremony had been one of unusual brilliancy (as if in unison with the feelings of those who, while they mourned the loss of departed goodness for their own sakes, could not but anticipate the bright reward to which both reason and Scripture encourage us to believe it is hereafter destined), became unexpectedly overcast and chill, although it did not appear to threaten rain. Lucy and Harcourt had both attended the funeral, and shared as well the touching emotions produced by the service and their recollections of the late incumbent, as the feeling of gloom which attended the alteration in the character of the day of which we

have spoken. It was the first time since the day of their engagement that they had experienced anything but sunshine either in the face of nature or their own hearts; and the change was proportionably great. As a kind of antidote to these gloomy feelings, Harcourt, who appeared more particularly susceptible to them, proposed that they should return home by a spot which certainly might be supposed to possess a charm capable of removing any such impressions—the ruined well and monastery of Tyn-y-groes. The farm lay only a short distance out of the direct path home from Llanfihangel, and Lucy, not without some not very sincere protestations as to Harcourt's folly in being so romantic, assented to this extension of their walk. On the way, she noticed to Harcourt a circumstance which had struck her as singular at the funeral; it related to his young *protégé*. "At least," said Lucy, "I conclude that was the young lad you spoke to, Edgar, soon after we entered the churchyard."

"You are quite right," answered Harcourt; "that was Philip. But what did you notice unusual in his manner?"

"Oh! possibly it is a mere fancy," said Lucy; "but something once or twice gave me the impression that he was *avoiding* one of us. He was standing at

no great distance from us, Edgar, you may remember; and in his position we ought, of course, to have seen his face plainly the whole time, but I could not help noticing that I, at least, never once did so. During the whole of the service he was either covering his face with his hands, or else stood with it averted from us, just as a person would do who wished not to be recognised. Once, indeed, at a part of the service when he seemed more than usually touched (for his manner showed extreme emotion throughout), I caught sight of a portion of his profile, not enough to identify the features, indeed, or enable me even to recognise them were I to meet him again, but still enough to suggest a likeness; and singularly enough it did so. Even from this glimpse of the face, Edgar, I could not help fancying it bore some resemblance, strangely enough, to my brother Charles, whom I lost just before we came here last year. But I had no time to observe it, for he immediately looked away again."

"Well, it is rather singular," answered Harcourt, "but I have once or twice thought Philip was like *you*. However, I have no doubt it is some fancy on both our parts. As to his averting his face, I should think it must have been by accident; at any rate, I know of no reason he could have for any conceal-

ment such as you mention. I like much what I have seen of the lad, and expect he will prove very useful to me. But here we are at the Monk's-pond, and there is the doorway in the brick wall standing open again, just as it did on that day when I first led you through it, little guessing the fair scene which lay inside, and still less the treasure I was to win there. Ah! what a different being I have been since that. I must claim a second edition, when we get there, of that first kiss of love which wrought such a transformation." And, for a time, as Harcourt again seated his blushing companion on the broken stone seat, insisting that she should occupy precisely the very identical spot she had done before, and proceeded, after some slight skirmishing on the young lady's part, to execute his chivalrous intention, he appeared quite to have rallied from the dejection which he had previously experienced. But the effect was only transient. As Harcourt again seated himself at his companion's feet, and in glowing language went over once more every incident, almost every thought and look of that memorable day, although he found no indication of any flagging interest or want of animation in his own mind, there still appeared some external cause which involuntarily checked his gaiety, and turned it into

gloom and depression. This was not wholly the result of natural causes, as it had been on the day of the storm, although the dull, leaden look of the sky, which was in fact clouded with one of those blights not uncommon in summer, certainly added to it; still less was it the associations of the ceremony they had lately witnessed, which, touching as they were, would not have suggested the singular feeling — almost one of uneasiness and apprehension — of which Harcourt was now again conscious, and against which he struggled ineffectually. His depression had now, too, communicated itself to his companion; and turning away with a half sigh (very different from the thrilling emotions of joy with which they had quitted it on the last occasion) from the old well-chamber,—the silent witness of their plighted love, the treasure-house of memories to which the richest of earth's jewels were but as dross,—Lucy and Harcourt slowly pursued their walk homewards.

CHAP. XII.

"Then sank the sun, and darkened were
The streets and every thoroughfare."

HOMER, *Od.* iii. 497.

AFTER luncheon Mrs. Witherby, as usual, discovered some business requiring to be despatched in another part of the house, and left the drawing-room unoccupied for the young lovers. But the same gloom still continued to hang over them. It was in vain that Harcourt, disguising the uneasiness which he himself felt, endeavoured to rally Lucy upon her silence. She repaid his exertions with one of her own bright smiles, but could not keep up the cheerfulness she had assumed.

"I am afraid, Edgar," Lucy at last said, "you will think me more foolish than you have ever done yet, but I can hardly tell you what a singular melancholy I have been feeling all the afternoon. Do you believe in presentiments, Edgar?"

"Very entirely," Harcourt answered; "and yet I hope heartily my belief is erroneous, for, like yourself, I have been feeling an unaccountable depression

ever since we returned from the funeral, a vague kind of foreboding, for which I can really assign no cause. But still, I wish your mother's answer had arrived. I hope, dearest, you are not wrong in anticipating the answer will be favourable. I have been thinking once or twice over what you said to me about your mother that day of the flood."

"Oh! you must not think of that, Edgar," Lucy answered. "Before you have known me much longer you will find out that I am a wild fanciful goose of a girl, and probably what I then said was only one of my fancies. But I wish you would do me a favour," added Lucy, who, even in talking to Harcourt, almost shrank from any allusion to the subject (one occasionally of intense pain) which hitherto had been the great secret of her life, and now instinctively felt anxious to give the conversation some other turn.

"Mr. Harcourt begs to inform Miss Akehurst of his readiness to accede to any wish she may express," said her lover, bowing politely.

"Well, mind you have promised. The favour is that you will sing me that air which you were playing the other day when I came into the drawing-room, and which you told me was your own."

"Oh! I have a cold, and the piano is out of tune,

and I have forgotten it, and it's really an age since I have played, as young ladies say. Besides, Lucy, I'm really too modest to sing, even for your good-natured ear, my own words —— ”

“ To your own music, clever fellow that you are,” interrupted Lucy. “ But you must sing me the piece, Edgar dear ; there is something plaintive about it, which I liked particularly, and it will just chime in with our present feelings. Remember, you have promised.”

“ Well, if that is the case, I must not prove faithless,” answered Harcourt. “ But it really is a stupid little thing; moreover, I have never had skill enough in music to compose a proper *accompaniment* for it; I can only just put the treble and bass notes together. But if you will be so wilful, you must take the consequences.” And Harcourt accordingly sat down to the instrument, and in a voice of some sweetness and compass sang the following * : —

“ Dreams of my childhood, in sadness awaking,

Crushed leaves of the garland, why mourn your decay ?

Blithe sings the lark when the young dawn is breaking,

But sadly the nightingale wails the spent day.

* We have been favoured (from a source to which we may have occasion again to refer) with a sight of this piece as originally set to music by Mr. E. Harcourt. We subjoin a copy for the reader's benefit, as an appendix to this volume.

" Lonely and dark is the home of bright faces,
The voices I loved are now strange to mine ear ;
Flowers die, but summer shall fill their void places ;
But the hearth of the desolate, oh ! who shall cheer ? "

Lucy encored the performance, which Harcourt repeated. He was then about to lead her to the piano, from which, with a listener so capable of appreciating her exquisite touch and the clear ringing notes of her voice, Lucy seldom escaped under an hour or two, when she was summoned by Mrs. Witherby to assist her in some indispensable domestic avocation, which, as it turned out, occupied a considerable time. Harcourt soon afterwards left the drawing-room, and he and Lucy re-entered it nearly at the same time. When they did so, a letter was lying upon the table, addressed to Lucy. It bore a foreign postmark, and was from Mrs. Akehurst. The reader will probably be anxious to know the contents of this document, which we will accordingly lay before him *in extenso*, premising only, that as its general character may not be in all respects such as he may possibly have anticipated, we shall be prepared to furnish him with a solution of the perplexity thus occasioned, in no very distant chapter. The letter (we need hardly say dictated by Mr. Butler) ran as follows : —

“Calais, June 18—.

“My dear, dear child,

“I find it very hard to write to you. I can hardly express to you the grief and anxiety which your packet of letters, which has been forwarded to me at the above address, has occasioned one who loves you so tenderly and fondly as myself. The subject to which it relates is one of the deepest interest to both of us, even under ordinary circumstances; and how much more in the present case. Lucy, my dear child, let me at once tell you that I do not in any way blame you for what you have done. Usually, indeed, it is more desirable that such a connection should be formed under a parent’s own eye; but in my absence, and the singular train of occurrences which have thrown you into such unrestrained intercourse with Mr. Harcourt, I cannot possibly complain of your having allowed him to win your affections; and from all I can gather from yours and Mrs. Witherby’s letters, he appears well worthy of your choice. And yet, having said this, I must now, once for all and finally, *forbid your engagement*.

“My beloved child, it is with inexpressible pain that I write as I have done.” (This, by the way, was

most literally true.) "It wrings my very heart to be obliged to thwart your natural wishes upon this subject; and it makes it still worse that I am precluded from assigning any reason for my doing so. There is a reason, alas! a very terrible one; but it is impossible that I should ever communicate it, above all to yourself. You must trust your parent's simple statement of the fact. I will only say, as I have already indeed implied, that it has no connection whatever with Mr. Harcourt. I have not the spirits to write to him myself in reply to his kind letter, but I must request you to convey to him my assurance that I fully credit the statement he has made as to his family and circumstances, and appreciate the compliment he has paid in applying for my daughter's hand. I could have desired, indeed, a match with more prospects of affluence for you, but I should certainly not have allowed this to stand in the way of your wishes. Would that other obstacles were as easily removed!

"And now, Lucy, I must close this letter, which is one of intense suffering to me, both on your account and my own. I shall trust to your own sense of duty immediately to give up Mr. Harcourt. The engagement is at an end; and I must desire that you neither correspond with nor attempt to see him,

after he has left Plas Newydd. I feel convinced that his own right feeling will aid you in doing this. I know and fully sympathise with this great trial for you, but it must be gone through to save you from one still greater—one which, in my own case, has occasioned me too lifelong feelings of remorse and anguish to allow of my exposing you to the same. Yes, my child, you may often have thought me cold and reserved, and may even have thought that I shunned your society. Indeed I have done so; but not from any want of love for you, but from its constantly probing and opening up again in its worst form the wound from which I have so long suffered in secret; one of which even your father was never aware. And now, may God bless you, my poor child. Nothing but the sternest sense of duty has induced me to write as I have done; I shall pray that this heavy blow may be lightened to you. On Mr. Harcourt's sense of honour I shall rely, both to assist you in following the path of obedience which you will see is right, and also under no circumstances to divulge the contents of this letter. You are at liberty to show it to him; and I have hinted, with the view of showing you that I am not acting a mere arbitrary or capricious part, at matters which have been for years a profound family secret, and which,

on *all* accounts, must always continue so. Believe ever in the love of her who is your best and truest friend,

“ Your MOTHER.

“ P.S. I had intended mentioning to you some circumstances of importance respecting myself, and of which I hope you will find the advantage. But I have not the heart to do so in this letter.”

It would be impossible for any language to describe the conflict of feelings which tore Lucy Akehurst's heart after perusing this unexpected epistle. Hastily passing it to Harcourt, she fled to her own room, and there, kneeling by the side of her small bed, after one irrepressible burst of thankfulness, in the midst of her grief, for the proof she had that day received that her mother's affections were not from her own conduct, nor any other cause, really alienated from her; that the fountain was not dried at its source, but from some mysterious cause sealed up in its outward expression, the poor broken-hearted girl prayed earnestly that she and Harcourt might be guided and sustained in the path of simple duty; above all, that she might herself do nothing which might add to the weight of secret grief under which she now perceived her mother had for so

long laboured. And then Lucy flung herself on the bed, and sobbed in passionate, bitter grief.

An hour or two had elapsed, when Harcourt tapped gently at the door. "Can you come down, Lucy?" he said; "I will do nothing to add to your trouble, dearest. I have quite made up my mind how to act."

Lucy promised to join him in a few minutes. She did not attempt to dry her tears, but entering the drawing-room, where Mrs. Witherby's considerate kindness had still left Harcourt alone, she threw herself into his arms, and again wept long and bitterly on that faithful breast. At length Lucy roused herself. "Edgar," she said, "you will try to help me, as dear mamma asks you to; will you not?"

"I will," Harcourt answered; "I came up to you for that purpose. Lucy, dearest, I will leave Plas Newydd to-night. I know it must be done; and it would be selfish indeed of me if, instead of aiding you under this great trial, I were to think only of my own grief. Lucy, it shall be as your mother wishes."

Harcourt's face was deadly pale, and the calmness with which, by a great exertion, he forced himself to speak, only served to show by its contrast the intense pain he was suffering. Lucy looked up, and

and the unselfish devotion, which she fully appreciated, with a smile of fond love — almost one of her bright smiles. Harcourt resumed :

"Then, Lucy dearest, it cannot be reasonable that you should go on for ever. At present, undoubtedly, your mother has a right to command implicit obedience, even if she finds it impossible to communicate her reasons ; and I know you will obey me less if I tried to persuade you to the contrary."

"But as time goes on, say in a year or two from this time, you will surely be entitled to know yourself, at any rate to know what this insuperable obstacle is. I cannot feel that a parent is justified in using this power arbitrarily to blight the hopes of a whole life ; there must be some limit. Parents of course recognise this ; and I cannot imagine that where a betrothal such as ours has taken place, the divine law would do the same."

"I will not," answered Lucy ; "perhaps it is better to look forward to the future. Very often the only hope I dare to give you or my faithful heart, Edgar dear) things turn out differently to what we expect ; something unexpected happens, and the difficulties which seemed insurmountable vanish in a moment. Do you remember the flight from the cavern on the day of the storm?"

At any rate," Lucy continued, "for the present the path of duty is quite clear, and we shall both probably do better not to look beyond it."

"I will try not to," said Harcourt, mournfully. "Lucy, dearest, there is only one other thing. I will not attempt to correspond with you, or hold any clandestine intercourse. I only thought if very, very seldom, say only twice a year, I might see you at a distance; I would not attempt to speak or communicate with you; only to stand outside your window, or on some path that you were likely to take, and see if it were but the outline of your form. How shall I know without this that you are well, that you are even alive?"

"No, Edgar," answered the noble-hearted girl; "it is best to keep to the path of simple obedience. Should anything happen to me (and indeed I do feel at times as if I could hardly bear up under this), you would doubtless hear of it. And you do not fear anything else, do you, Edgar dear?" added Lucy, again looking up full in his face; "you *do* trust me to be your own, your very own?" Edgar strained the trembling form to his heart, and Lucy continued: "Oh! Edgar, I do love you, you do not know how fondly and entirely; nothing in the world can ever prevent my doing *that*. Yes, dearest,

I shall always feel that I am yours, your chosen one, your betrothed wife ; that not a particle in my heart can ever belong to any other. Even if we should never meet again in this world, never speak to or see each other more, I must still be yours, and yours only. And I shall think of you night and day, in my prayers, in my work, in-doors and out of doors, in health and sickness. Does that satisfy you, Edgar ? I can promise you *that*, if it is any comfort to you, for that is what is, and ever must be." And with an uncontrollable burst of grief Lucy hid her face on Harcourt's shoulder, and wept long and bitterly.

It was about two hours later that Harcourt, having taken an affectionate leave of Mrs. Witherby, prepared to quit the scene of such powerful and conflicting emotions. He parted from Lucy in the small room on the right hand side of the door which entered from the garden terrace. The dusk of evening had begun to fall, and its shadows seemed to gather additional blackness and assume a more intense and almost tangible form in the dark oak-panelling of the apartment. Neither Lucy nor Harcourt spoke, excepting once, when a sudden thought struck the former. "Edgar," she said, "will you promise me something ?"

"All, everything, except to give up my love for you," Harcourt answered.

"I know that it will be hard for you to do what I ask," Lucy continued, "but indeed it will be best. It is that you will continue your reading for the examination, as if this had not happened. Will you promise me this?"

"I will try," Harcourt replied. He could not trust himself to say more. With a heart wrung with agony, he once more encircled the weeping girl in a long passionate embrace, and, stifling a cry of anguish which rose to his lips, passed out on to the terrace walk. And then darkness fell upon Plas Newydd.

CHAP. XIII.

"In snaky coils entangled thus
'T were no light task for Pegasus
To burst the monster's chain.

HOR. *Od.* I. xxvii. 23.

It was not without exciting some speculation, on the part both of pastor and congregation, that on the Sunday following the return of Mr. and Mrs. Butler to Plas Newydd, which took place about ten days after Harcourt's departure, the first named of that worthy couple presented himself at Rhos-y-Gelynion chapel, as an attendant of the ministrations of "the Rev." Hilkiah Owen. Mr. Butler was alone upon this occasion. Mrs. Witherby had left Plas Newydd, having received a civil dismissal, with an acknowledgment of her services in keeping house, the week previously; and Mrs. Butler (we find it difficult not to call her still Mrs. Akehurst) was indisposed. Lucy, who more from consideration for her mother than any other cause, had roused herself, after Harcourt's departure, to share as she best might in the routine of daily life, had been invited by Mr.

Butler to accompany him to the chapel, but had ultimately declined. His manner in naming the subject to her was, as it always had been, courteous and respectful ; it even, since his altered relations to her, had now an air of considerate kindness, as if he was aware of the objection she would naturally feel to the second alliance her mother had contracted, and was prepared even to expect and allow for a certain amount of personal prejudice against himself. As regarded her attendance at Rhos-y-Gelynion, Butler, in naming the subject to her the evening previously, had intimated, with delicacy and tact, that on this and all similar points she would, of course, at her time of life, feel herself absolutely free to follow her own inclinations. " His own convictions," he said, " had, especially during the last few months, led him to feel that the Gospel was more faithfully preached in its fulness and simplicity by those who dissented from the Church of England, than by its own clergy ; and he proposed, during his residence at Plas Newydd, to become a regular attendant at the new chapel, the minister of which was, he understood, a God-fearing and pious person ; the difference of the language was of course a great drawback, but he hoped, by degrees, to master it, and he understood there was frequently an English

sermon. Your dear mother," Butler continued, "I am happy to say, agrees with me in these views, and it will be a great happiness to us if you will join our devotions in that more humble temple; but we should wish to leave it entirely to your own discretion." Lucy asked a little time to consider, as she was agreeably surprised by the considerate kindness of Butler's manner, and felt very reluctant to offer any apparent slight to his wishes, or those of her mother, the unexpected warmth of whose letter on the subject of her engagement to Harcourt, (although no further reference had been made to it, and Mrs. Butler's manner still exhibited the same singular alienation as before,) had sunk deep into her young heart. Lucy, however, in this, as in all other questions which arose for her decision, adopted the straightforward course, which had often saved her from a maze of difficulties, of simply considering what was right, without speculating on the consequences. She was well aware, even had her own knowledge and convictions been less settled, of the dislike which Harcourt would have felt to her attending, from any cause, a sectarian place of worship; and this at once decided her in the resolution, which she announced in reply to Butler's question the next morning, of going to church as often as cir-

cumstances would permit at Llanfihangel, to which a new incumbent had just been appointed.—But it is time to return to Mr. Butler's own devotions.

Nothing could exceed the decorous attention of this exemplary gentleman during the somewhat lengthy discourse of which Hilkiah delivered himself on this occasion. The congregation was numerous, with some peculiarities which readily distinguished them from those who still adhered to the formularies of the older worship. The most remarkable of them was the habit, now almost universal in Wales, of emitting, at particular parts of the sermon or extempore prayer which are supposed to touch the spiritual condition of the hearer, a series of groans, varying in intensity with individual temperament, but which, coupled with the incessant and profound expectorations of the faithful, on which even Hilkiah's new deal floor seemed to impose no restraint, might have induced any stranger who had listened, with closed eyes, to have supposed himself on board a Boulogne steam-packet. Without actually participating in these devotional exercises, Mr. Butler still evinced, as we have said, a marked and highly creditable attention to the proceedings, of which, it is needless to say, he did not understand a single word; and, on the rest of the congregation quitting

the chapel, he remained behind for a few minutes' conversation with the preacher, whose acquaintance, indeed, he had already made (in his secular capacity) by having given some orders of considerable amount at the shop in the preceding week. Hilkiah was evidently gratified by the demeanour of this new member of his flock, as well as by the compliments which he addressed to himself on the number and respectability of the congregation at Rhos-y-Gelynion ; and he acceded graciously to Mr. Butler's expression of a wish that the service might, occasionally, be conducted in English, for the benefit of the family at Plas Newydd. "As regarded Mrs. Butler," her husband added, "he was happy to say that she had been converted for some time past, and although prevented by illness from attending on that day, looked forward with much happiness to the advantages of Mr. Owen's ministry. She had, indeed, been sorely tried, not only by the still recent losses she had sustained, but still more, if possible, by a mental affliction of unusual severity, which had embittered some of the best years of life ; but she had reaped the benefit of this in a changed and softened heart. As to Miss Akehurst," Butler added, "although a young lady of an amiable temper, he feared she was still immersed in worldly vanities,

and that the words of godly counsel would at present be thrown away upon her. But we will hope," he said, "for the best." After some further interchange of compliments, the speakers separated on excellent terms, Butler having added an invitation to Hilkiash to join the family dinner at Plas Newydd in the course of the week following, which that worthy cordially accepted.

Now the reader will doubtless have conjectured that the present theological tendencies of Mr. Butler's character had not taken place without some excellent reasons in their favour. The fact is, Butler was very anxious to stand on good terms with the self-constituted minister of Rhos-y-Gelynion. In the first place, Hilkiash's influence was considerable in the valley; and Butler saw many advantages in the gossip of the neighbourhood (which was certain to embrace the daily occurrences and modes of life at Plas Newydd and the character of its inmates) receiving a favourable tinge through this medium. But besides the indirect influence which his new ally might thus exercise, and which, in the case of inquiry, was likely to be of considerable importance, Butler had other and more immediate ends in view. The development of his schemes in their present stage imperatively required, as the reader will

shortly see, the intervention of some third person in more than one capacity, and Hilkiah seemed peculiarly suited for the purpose ; in addition to which the Post-Office had recently, Butler found, decided on establishing a permanent branch at Rhos-y-Gelynion, in lieu of the peripatetic transmission of letters which had hitherto sufficed, more or less well, for the wants of the valley, and this appointment of post-master had been solicited and obtained by Mr. Owen. Some degree of control over this useful establishment, if he could in any way acquire it, Butler saw was likely to prove extremely valuable ; the more so as he had soon ascertained that a letter to Mrs. Witherby, the only one which Lucy had written as far as he knew since their arrival, had been posted by herself in the course of a walk to Rhos-y-Gelynion, instead of being reserved for the family letter-bag. It was like the advantage, familiar to us in the present day, of having the exclusive command of *the electric telegraph*.

Mr. Owen appeared at Plas Newydd in the week following pursuant to invitation, and contrived to get through the formalities of dinner without any serious *faux pas*. Mrs. Butler was not at table when the gentlemen were left alone with their wine. Butler apologised for her absence more at length

than he had previously done. "The unhappy circumstances," he said, "which he had before adverted to, had left an impression of deep gloom upon her mind, which made her, for many weeks together, wholly unequal to society. Her sensibility in particular was so exquisite, especially since the double bereavement she had undergone, that any circumstance or allusion which at all touched upon the more permanent ground of her sorrow, (the mental affliction he had referred to,) caused her the most acute anguish; all the more," Butler added, "because it is unhappily connected with a cause which is ever present to her, and renews it in its worst form. He trusted his visitor would pardon him his allusion to domestic circumstances."

Gradually, Mr. Owen became more and more intimate at Plas Newydd. He occasionally saw Lucy during meal-times, or when her attendance was required in the drawingroom; Mrs. Butler never appeared at all. Although Hilkiah was of too practical a turn to indulge in much speculation on matters which did not affect him in a pecuniary point of view, his imagination was certainly stimulated by the reference which Butler had made to his wife's state of feeling and the mystery which seemed to attach to her; and not being a person of

peculiarly delicate instincts, he felt no scruple in occasionally adverting to the subject. Butler evinced no reluctance to speak of it, although still in the same guarded way as before; and this suppressed mode of allusion so excited Mr. Owen's curiosity, that by degrees he found himself thinking of the subject whenever he approached the house, and during the whole period of this visit there. At length, Butler ventured to break ground. "Mr. Owen," he said, "I have a rather singular request to make, which I shall not be at all surprised by your declining to accede to. I may as well state it however. It is, that in the event of any letters arriving in the office addressed to Miss Akehurst, or in case she should herself despatch any (I will show you her handwriting, so that you will at once recognise the latter), you will have the great consideration not to forward them to their destination without first apprising either Mrs. Butler or myself. I can assure you that I have very good reasons for making this request, which I am aware must appear unusual."

Hilkiah at once promised compliance, adding that even if Mr. Butler did not feel disposed to state the grounds for it at present, he should entertain no doubt of their being such as would justify him in so doing. Butler expressed warm thanks for his

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friend's courtesy. "I do not know," he said, "whether there will be any occasion to trespass upon your kindness, but it is always a possible occurrence. As to my reasons for making the request I have done, there is hardly perhaps time, or, in fact, opportunity" (Butler glanced towards the door) "to state them at present, but I shall not at all object to do so to one for whom I have been led to entertain so much respect as yourself. Indeed, if certain outward appearances continue, I think it very probable that I may be glad, before long, to communicate to you the circumstances to which I have hitherto only distantly alluded, with the object of claiming your kind sympathy and advice. To-day I will barely intimate, I need not say as a profound secret, that there are particular points" (Butler dropped his voice here) "in Miss Akehurst's temperament which have always required the most anxious watching. In the event of her forming, for instance, any romantic attachment, or indulging in any overstrained feeling, the mental injury likely to ensue would be *of the most serious character*. I have always wished she could have had the advantage of being under your ministration, which would have subdued this tendency to excitement; but she seems opposed to it herself, and the attempt

to force it would probably only bring about the evil we are desirous of averting. But I will talk to you more fully upon this subject some other time, if you will forgive my intruding these family topics on your attention. Meanwhile, you will kindly do what I have asked?"

Hilkiah again assented, and shortly afterwards took his leave.

The fact is, that Butler's brain, inexhaustible in its resources, had now conceived one of the most subtle and at the same time nefarious schemes which ever entered into the mind of man. The circumstances we have detailed in the previous part of this volume had proved, as Butler had on many other occasions experienced, singularly fortunate for the development of his plans, and everything appeared now ripe for their execution. The fitting opportunity, for which he had watched long and anxiously, studying points of character, personal habits, even accidents of locality with fearful minuteness, was not long in presenting itself.

Some four or five weeks had elapsed since Mr. and Mrs. Butler's return to Plas Newydd. The summer was at its height; the weather usually sultry during the day, but the evenings, which although July was far advanced still showed little

abatement of their length, deliciously cool and pleasant, almost compelling those with whom health or occupation did not interfere, to pass them out of doors. Hilkiah Owen was now, by Butler's express invitation, a frequent visitor at Plas Newydd, where he now usually remained to dinner. The *cuisine* and wines were excellent; and both the physical and spiritual man of the pastor experienced a gratification in partaking of the hospitalities of such a distinguished member of the Rhos-y-Gelynion congregation, which, even had the Plas Newydd custom at the shop been less valuable than it was, would have more than compensated the slight drawback of the distance between the two places. It was after one of these dinners, which usually terminated about six o'clock, that Butler found the opportunity to which we have referred. Lucy had just risen from the table, where she had sat for a few minutes after dinner, leaving Mr. Butler and his guest at their wine; Mrs. Butler, as usual, was in her own apartment. The sun had just set, and Lucy, taking her work from the drawing-room, retired to a wooden bench on the terrace walk we have more than once spoken of, which commanded a delightful view of the upper valley, with a glimpse of the distant mountains which overhung its lower

extremity, and which were still warm and bright with purple light. To make what follows intelligible to our readers, it is indispensable that we should endeavour to convey to them a brief idea of the localities in which the scene we have now to describe took place.

The rear of the house, which overlooked the terrace walk, presented an irregular frontage of some extent, and not unpicturesque appearance. In particular, the part of the building in which the drawing-room was situated projected considerably in advance of the rest ; while the seat which Lucy occupied was in one of the angles thus formed, close by the drawing-room windows, which at the present time were wide open. Hence, as Lucy sat on the bench, every syllable spoken at the windows of the room would be distinctly audible to her, while she would herself be concealed from the speakers, unless they had studiously endeavoured to gain sight of her retreat. All these particulars Butler had observed carefully with a view to his present design ; he had also with the same object, on every previous occasion, remained over his wine in the dining-room with Mr. Owen until the latter took his leave, which he usually did between nine and ten, quitting the house by the front door ; Mr. Butler then always retired to an

upstairs room which he had established as a kind of study or office for business. Hence the drawing-room and terrace walk, which the reader may recollect were at the back or river side of the house, were always safe from interruption after dinner was over; and Lucy, finding this to be the case, had, as Butler well knew, been in the habit, whenever the evening was not unfavourable, of spending it in the place she now occupied. On the present occasion, to avoid any possibility of mistake, he had ascertained the fact (apologising to his guest for a momentary absence), by a cautious scrutiny from one of the upstairs windows.—But it is time to return from this long although necessary digression.

As Lucy sat upon the bench we have described, and watched the exquisite tints of the sunset gradually combine into a hue like that of molten gold, and then fade away into the grey twilight, the recollections of the scene which she had so often gazed at with Harcourt from the same place (for this had been one of their favourite resorts), smote upon the heart of the young girl too powerfully to be resisted, and, dropping her work, she wept long and silently. The evening was perfectly warm and serene, and, although the twilight by degrees began to grow more and more dim, and the stars to show

faintly in the summer sky, Lucy found no inconvenience from the lateness of the hour, and still remained occupied with her own sad thoughts. It might have been about two hours or more from the time of her quitting the dining-room, when she was surprised by hearing voices close at hand;—they were those of Mr. Butler and Owen, continuing apparently, after a passing remark, some conversation in which they had been previously engaged, and which, although her name was not mentioned, evidently bore reference to her, and was of a nature to make it impossible for her to refrain from gathering every syllable of it. It was Butler's voice that spoke first.

"A beautiful evening, is it not, Mr. Owen? so still and peaceful. I hope I have not hurried you with your wine."

"No, surely," said Hilkiah, "I am quite satisfied, Mr. Butler."

"You see," continued Butler, "the dining-room is rather close to the servants' offices, and it would be most undesirable for persons, in that class of life especially, to overhear the subject we were speaking of."

"The poor young lady has never been told of it herself, I think you said?" observed Hilkiah.

"Never; on the contrary, whether judiciously or not, it has always been most carefully kept from her knowledge. Unhappily, at the present time a fresh difficulty has arisen in this unfortunate attachment."

"Mrs. Butler did not permit the young people to be engaged, you said?" inquired Hilkiab, whose curiosity was now in a state of gratified enjoyment, and eagerly caught up every particular.

"On no account," answered Butler. "Not only, as I intimated the other day, would the excitement of such a thing probably be very injurious to the poor girl herself, but it would be most unjust towards Mr. Harcourt, who appears to be a gentleman of much amiability and talent. Even if she were to escape herself, which I fear is hardly possible, there would be the danger of transmitting it to her family. The misery my wife has felt upon that account, Mr. Owen, would hardly be credited. Although, thank God, her own mind has shown no traces of the evil, still her grief for her daughter's sake is of the most overwhelming character."

"Is the insanity then so very decided in Mrs. Butler's family?" asked Hilkiab.

"Fearfully so," was the answer. "One of my wife's uncles died raving mad in an asylum; another,

I understand, perished by his own hands. Her own brothers and sisters, like herself, have, I believe, escaped, *with one exception*, a married sister, much older than Mrs. Butler, who has been settled for many years abroad, and has at times required to be under some restraint. But in the next generation, as is usually the case, the evil has recurred in an aggravated form. There are only three children I believe of this sister, who was the only one of the family who married besides my wife. All these have, as they grew up, manifested unequivocal symptoms of derangement: the eldest, a very beautiful and sweet girl almost twenty-one, quite suddenly at dinner one day, without any previous symptoms, took up the carving knife, and after attempting the life of her younger sister, destroyed herself in a way too horrible to mention. The matter was kept profoundly quiet, which it was easy enough to do in the remote district in which they lived; and my wife never knew of it or in fact of there being anything wrong, until long after she married; since then her life has become a perfect burden to her. Especially, since the great affliction she has undergone during the last two years, her grief upon the account I have mentioned has assumed almost a feeling of remorse. It appears

to her, I need not say how unjustly, as if she had acted quite a guilty part in giving birth to those who might inherit and perpetuate the evil; especially, she feels this towards my poor step-daughter, who I grieve to say is considered very much to resemble her cousin, the sweet girl I was telling you of. Frequently, for days and weeks together, Mrs. Butler feels herself quite unequal to converse with or even see her daughter."

"Poor things!" ejaculated Hilkiah, very sincerely, for even *his* mercenary heart was touched.

"I need not request you," continued Butler, "to observe the strictest silence as to what I have mentioned. Although I know we have, and are much indebted for, your kind sympathy, still I should not have been justified in naming the subject to you but for the reasons stated in a former conversation."

Hilkiah readily promised entire secrecy. He seemed about to refer, with more particularity than would have been agreeable, to the request which Butler had made to him in the conversation last referred to, but his host interrupted him.

"Thank you, thank you, sincerely," said Butler, with some alacrity; "I knew that I might reckon upon your kindness. The matter indeed is known to some few persons, but in the way people talk, such

things are always best kept quiet, above all for the poor girl's sake. Her father, I *believe* (I am not sure, for I seldom like to speak to my wife on a subject so painful to her), never knew it; I only became acquainted with it myself accidentally, through some documents connected with Mrs. Butler's affairs, which I managed during the year or two preceding our marriage."

"I should have fancied," suggested Hilkiiah, "that knowing this, you would have been afraid of any alliance in that quarter."

Butler did not seem displeased with the remark, *gauche* as it was. "Why you see, Mr. Owen," he answered, "nothing of the kind has ever manifested itself in Mrs. Butler's case, for the feeling of remorse to which I have alluded, terrible as it is to her, does not amount to anything like a delusion; it is merely, in fact, an exaggerated form of parental affection and solicitude. And as to what would otherwise have formed the principal ground of apprehension, there are reasons (which will be at once obvious to you) why I had nothing to apprehend from such an union. As regards our marriage itself, the fact is that, having been brought into considerable intercourse with Mrs. Butler, from my professional engagements, I had the opportunity of admiring and

respecting her worth" (Butler hemmed slightly) "and disinterestedness of character; and the feeling of isolation and want of protection and advice which forms one of the most painful parts of widowhood, gradually led to an union, in which, although we are not so foolish as to claim for it the romance of a first love, it will always be my careful study to promote her happiness. And now," Butler added, after a pause, "we will drop this very painful subject, which, however, I am glad to have had the opportunity of naming to you. I had half feared that we might have found the poor girl herself in the drawing-room, but I think she must generally sit upstairs of an evening; I have accidentally come in here once or twice about this time, and found her absent. If you are sure you will take no more wine," added Butler, "perhaps you would like a stroll in the garden? our hats, I think, are on the slab outside the dining-room." The two gentlemen went in quest of their hats, which were in the place indicated, a small lobby, out of sight, as Butler well knew, of the back hall; while quick as light as soon as they had disappeared, a slight trembling figure fled into the house from the open door of the terrace-walk, and, darting upstairs into one of the black-panelled rooms, with a low cry of intense

agony buried its face in the coverlid of the bed which had already witnessed so much grief in that young heart.

It is needless to say that the whole of the circumstances detailed by Butler with so much particularity were a pure fiction. The atrocious scheme he had formed is now fully before the reader; it varied in some respects from that which had at first suggested itself to him, owing to the altered circumstances of the case. To his wife Butler had not yet found it necessary to communicate his entire design; all that he at present required of her, in fact, was to maintain towards Lucy the same general demeanour (modified, in the event of the latter making any reference to the subject, by some expressions of commiseration and interest in unison with the tone of Mrs. Butler's continental letter, but avoiding any detailed conversation) which she had exhibited during their previous residence at Plas Newydd. On Lucy herself Butler had calculated that the fearful communication she had overheard would produce a profound effect, preying, in the seclusion in which she was now placed, on the health probably of both mind and body. Her knowledge of her mother's family was, as he was well aware, extremely slight; and even had it been otherwise, she

had no means of discovering the real state of the case, or the least clue which might lead her even to a suspicion of the falsehoods which had been so artfully placed before her. Generous, warm-hearted, confiding, incapable of swerving for a moment from the strict path of duty, Butler knew Lucy to be, by close observation; and he relied upon these qualities, aided by her warm imagination and impulsive temperament, for fully playing their part in the development of his plans; while the complete isolation of the poor girl, and the disappointment of her attachment to Harcourt, which even before the conversation with Hilkiah Owen had visibly preyed upon her spirits, seemed to promise the most important results. He was destined not to be disappointed.

CHAP. XIV.

"The wretched sophistry prevails."

ÆSCH. Agam. 385.

Hour after hour of that terrible night, Lucy kept her solitary vigil where she had first thrown herself; motionless, speechless, alas! tearless also. She then rose from the bedside, and, taking out her small writing-case from a drawer, pressed her hands firmly upon her brow for a moment or two, and began to write. It was a letter to Harcourt, and ran as follows:—

"Plas Newydd, July, 18—

"Edgar, dearest Edgar,

"You will be surprised, after what has passed, to see my handwriting. I cannot write much, for I am ill, I think; my brain is burning; but what I have to say will not admit of delay. Edgar, you must try and hear patiently what I have to tell you. I have heard, I know all, through a strange accident; and yet how thankful I am, with all the misery, that it *has* happened. Edgar, when we

parted, although things looked dark and unpromising, I could not help cherishing, as I have done all these weeks, a calm, trustful hope that all might hereafter be well. *Now*, I know that it can never be ; that I must recall my promise, must never, never be yours. It would be a great sin in me even to wish for it.

“Edgar, dearest, try and bear this, try and forget me ; indeed, indeed you must. Oh ! that I still love you fondly, passionately, almost to distraction, I know but too well ; I know you will never doubt that. But there is an obstacle, Edgar, a most terrible obstacle ; one which I must never breathe to you or any other, for the sake of those whom it involves beside myself, but one which is fatal, final, irretrievable. Oh ! my love, my only heart’s love ! I would fain hope that life may not be long to me, although I desire humbly to leave it in the hands of One who has sent us this heavy blow. But, be it long or short, nothing can ever take from me the deep love which I still cherish as part of my very being. We must never meet, Edgar ; never again see each other, or write, or even think of each other. I cannot promise now, as I did before, to think of you night and day ; *now*, I must tear you from my thoughts and memory, as one whose love never can be mine ; whose generous heart will

ere long, I hope, when time admits, be claimed by one worthy of it, and fitted to make it happy ; but never, never more can, or ought to be mine. Only, deep, very deep down in my soul, beneath reason and memory and almost consciousness, I shall ever treasure my *own* changeless love, the only good thing which this world can ever now have for me, whole and entire. Once, and once only, when I know that I am on my deathbed, shall I allow myself to think of you and pronounce your name. And now, Edgar, dearest, farewell, farewell, and, indeed, for ever. May God ever bless and keep you, dearest. You must not try and answer this, Edgar ; I cannot, dare not, receive it ; I must not even open anything that you might write. We must be separated at once and altogether.

“ Your own, ever only your own,

“ LUCY.

“ P. S. There is one thing I will still claim from you, Edgar, dear, and that is the fulfilment of your promise ; you recollect what it was. There is something, I hardly know what, which impels me to ask this. I know how hard it will be to you ; but I know you will not deny me this my last request. And once more, and for ever in this world, farewell.”

It was not without some anxiety, of which, however, no trace appeared in his outward man, that Butler, on the day following, watched the object of his machinations deposit the above letter in the bag with her own hands, a minute or two only before the usual post hour. Without entertaining any cause for suspicion, Lucy was naturally unwilling that even the superscription of a letter from herself to Harcourt should be seen by any other eyes; the circumstance, which Butler had previously noticed, of her having posted a letter at Rhos-y-Gelynion was the result of accident. The fingers of that worthy gentleman somewhat tingled as the letter-bag was carried past the window, but any interference would of course have been highly indiscreet, and he relied with confidence on the good offices of his ally Hilkiah Owen. He was not disappointed. Early on the forenoon of the following day, Butler took an accidental stroll in the direction of Rhos-y-Gelynion. As he passed Mr. Owen's door, that gentleman, who had seen him entering the village, and was standing in front of the shop, made a sign expressive of his desire for some conversation; and without delay ushered his visitor into a small back parlour, in which the concerns of his Majesty's post-office were transacted, in common with the bookkeeping de-

partment of Mr. Owen's groceries and haberdashery. Carefully closing the door, the worthy Hilkiah extracted Lucy's letter from a private drawer, and with a meaning look placed it in Butler's hands. "Came in the bag yesterday," was Mr. Owen's explanation of this act. Butler made no reply, but without ceremony proceeded with considerable ingenuity to open the seal, which had been hastily formed, and only with a commonplace impression for which another might easily be substituted. Hilkiah's mind appeared somewhat disturbed at his confederate's assurance; he had complied with his request, it is true, but he had not thought it necessary hitherto, by any process of analysis or induction, to develop it into its natural results; and at that precise moment the character of the act he was thus sanctioning, did somehow, very unmistakably, force itself upon his notice. In some measure, this was owing to the fact that as Hilkiah raised his left hand (he had been stooping forward, relocking the drawer with his right), apparently with some intention of protesting against Butler's violation of the seal, his coat sleeve accidentally turned the leaves of Hilkiah's own pulpit bible, which lay open on the table, and presented, as it were for his express and special perusal, a certain text, which infers no inconsiderable con-

demnation upon those who "do evil that good may come." Hilkiash turned extremely pale at the rebuke of this silent monitor, and might perhaps have carried out the intention which he manifested, of snatching the epistle from his visitor's hand. But, unhappily for his better resolution, side by side on the table with the warning volume, lay Hilkiash's own ledger, in which, as he well knew, the family at Plas Newydd figured as customers for a very desirable total. And thus, while the worthy man, like the prophet's coffin at Mecca, remained suspended between earth and heaven, the seal was opened, and Butler was deep in the perusal of the letter. Now that the act was done, Hilkiash would have been very glad to have reaped his share of the reward by the gratification of his natural curiosity as to the contents of the epistle. Butler, however, did not indulge him. He read on to the end with an expression of countenance in which his companion could detect no traces either of dissatisfaction or the contrary; and then, with many thanks for Mr. Owen's courtesy and attention, in which he contrived entirely to drown the hints expressed by the latter of his desire to become better informed upon the subject, quitted the shop, after leaving some trifling orders for the house, and proceeded on foot down the valley. When he

was out of sight, he again took out and carefully reperused the letter. Apparently it *was* perfectly satisfactory to him; with a quick step he walked on to the post-town we have already mentioned, and having resealed it in the coffee-room of the principal inn, himself dropped it into the box there; — this extraordinary exertion on Mr. Butler's part being the result of a natural disinclination to leave the letter in Hilkieah's hands, who would, he doubted not, have applied the same process to it which he had done himself. Butler then returned home in a gig hired from the hotel; and dismissing the latter a short distance below Rhos-y-Gelynion (that Hilkieah might not find out where he had been, which would have implied suspicion of himself), proceeded on foot to Plas Newydd. His coadjutor experienced one or two slight twinges of conscience in the course of the evening, and might even have been subjected to greater annoyance from the same quarter, had it not been for his opportune recollection of a text, which his practice in pulpit oratory enabled him readily to adapt to his use in this emergency. "Behold, is it not a little one?" ejaculated Hilkieah boldly, the next time the word "sin" was breathed in his ear by this unseen monitor. And it is worthy of remark, that he found this rejoinder of so much efficacy, as not

only to relieve him from any further molestation on this particular case, but also to admit of his repeating the malpractice with perfect impunity on future occasions. So that eventually, Lucy's own letters, as well as those which arrived for her, came to be sent up from the Rhos-y-Gelynion post-office, as a matter of course, in an envelope addressed to her stepfather and sedulous protector, Mr. Butler, who delivered or despatched them, as the case might be, according as his discretion taught him would be best for all parties.

And now began for poor Lucy a period of dark terror, one of those ordeals to which no human intellect can be subjected and come forth unscathed. There *may* be those who, defenceless and unarmed, could watch with a steady pulse and an unblanched countenance the fierce tiger crouching for his spring; there *may* be those who could take some corroding poison into their system, and trace its progress through the veins undismayed, until it approaches the citadel and seat of life; but who can look *madness* in the face? Who, that believes himself to bear about with him as his patrimony the seeds of the brain's distemper, that at which men shudder and avert their faces, that which in a moment may convert the gentle pleadings of love, the firm grasp

of reason, even the sympathies and common instincts of humanity, into something more raging, more desperate than the wildest brute ; something which must be driven into darkness, chained, lashed, incarcerated ; something fearful in its energy, pitiful in its uncleanness, the type and visible emblem of a demoniac existence ; who, that believes that *this* may at any hour, nay, that it almost certainly will, come upon him, be his brain at present clear and his memory untroubled as you will, can gaze without the most intense horror upon his doom ? And this, too, Lucy had to bear in solitude, alone, unaided. Butler had chosen his weapons well.

Lucy's first impulse, as we have seen, after she had recovered from the impact of the shock she had sustained in the fatal secret so unexpectedly disclosed to her, had been to write to Harcourt. A thick wall of separation, she felt, must be at once and for ever built up between them. Never could she be his ; impossible. Even had *he* wished it, if he knew all ; even if *he* could have thought it right, was she herself to permit it ? For one brief moment, the dream, the happy dream of fond love, the bright hours they had shared together, the thought of what life would be, spent at *his* side, communing with *him*, pouring together in one channel the golden waters

of feeling and intellect, rose before her with a vividness and distinctness which she had never permitted to herself since the hour their engagement was broken off. She looked at it with a deep earnest gaze, as at the colouring and fair outline of some picture which must never again be beheld in life, and then — resolutely put it from her. Never could she be Harcourt's wife; another must fill that envied place, while Lucy herself, separated from *him*, which was indeed as death, by a decree which nothing could ever alter, must follow her own wretched doom to the grave. And to this effect, as we have seen, she wrote to Harcourt.

And then Lucy's thoughts reverted to her mother, at first almost incessantly, almost to the total exclusion of her own share in the fearful calamity which involved them both. What a lifelong grief must her mother's have been, she reflected; how fatal her ignorance of the secret curse of her family until it was too late to prevent its consequences in her own case; what a warning to Lucy herself, had she been wrong and wilful enough still to cherish any thought of an union with Harcourt! What a light, too, was now thrown upon parts of her mother's conduct to herself, which had appeared *strange* and inexplicable! Instinctively she understood all that Butler had im-

plied ; how every look and action of a child under such circumstances, instead of giving gratification, must have inspired feelings of horror and uneasiness. What a happiness even, Lucy thought, that Charles had been taken away so early. Any want of emotion which had caused her surprise in her mother's manner at the time of his illness, was now fully accounted for ; his death was one cause of painful solicitude the less to her. How eagerly the broken-hearted but unselfish girl longed to lay her head upon her mother's heart, and sobbing there, tell her that she knew all ; that she would be guided wholly by her counsels, would avoid anything that might accelerate the evil beforehand, and bear it with meek submission when it came, entreating her, above all, that they might be one in this sorrow, and that she might have the privilege of sharing the grief of which she had unwillingly been the cause. Day after day, Lucy anxiously endeavoured to procure an interview with her mother, but the opportunity never offered. Mrs. Butler was still more rarely seen than formerly, and when she did quit her own apartment, her countenance still wore the chilling morose expression which had latterly become habitual to it, coupled now indeed, at times, with another look, a kind of heavy vacuity, which Lucy was wholly at a

loss to account for, but which occasioned her the greatest uneasiness.

As to this we must say a few words. The fact is, that any difficulty which Butler might have had in inducing his unhappy confederate to pursue the line of conduct which, as we intimated at the close of our last chapter, he had so carefully marked out for her, was quite obviated by a feature in Mrs. Butler's character, which about this time began to assume considerable prominence. Although it is ungallant to hint at such matters where the fair sex are concerned, it is impossible for us, compatibly with our duty as veracious historians, to disguise the fact that the lady in question was gradually acquiring the habit of taking much more wine than was at all good for her. She had first commenced the practice during her unsuccessful return to fashionable life in the spring, and the mortifications and frequent solitary hours which resulted upon that experiment. Butler's observant eye had not overlooked these irregularities, but they were too occasional and undeveloped to enter into his calculations, either as a thing to be encouraged or otherwise, until the time of their return to Plas Newydd. Here, however, the practice became more and more habitual. It was part of Butler's plan, for more than one reason, to keep a

well-supplied table, and good wines ; and Mrs. Butler, when present, indulged in both without scruple, and with an effect upon her gait and manner which, although it escaped Lucy's notice, would have been perfectly apparent to those who were less unsuspecting. At length things reached a climax.

It was still in the early period of their residence at Plas Newydd, and before Hilkiah had begun to be so intimate there as he subsequently became, that one day, at dinner, both before and after the cloth was removed, Mrs. Butler's libations attained a point which, in a few minutes would have led to an inevitable catastrophe. Lucy was fortunately absent from indisposition ; Mr. Butler made no remark upon his wife's conduct, but sat quietly by until the time arrived for his interference, watching the strong heady wine do its work, and turning over in his mind the best mode of making the circumstance available for the furtherance of his schemes. His unhappy associate, it is true, was entirely in his power ; how far she might have consented to go, had any actual violence become necessary, might possibly be questioned ; but Butler had very wisely, for the present at any rate, excluded everything of the kind from his combinations. Even the full extent of the latter

he had not thought it necessary to bring under his wife's eye, contenting himself with giving her merely such general rules for her guidance as we have already referred to (and which indeed harmonised well enough with her own disposition), and only gradually allowing the nefarious plans he had formed to become known to her; so that her part in the latter was purely subordinate, or, to use a favourite phrase now-a-days, ministerial. Still, Butler was not indisposed to smoothe the path of obedience for his confederate by any motives of private gratification which chance might offer; and the present incident seemed to suggest the mode of doing so. Accordingly, when matters reached the point we have mentioned, Butler, who had been silent for some time previously, turned round and said, rather sharply, "You are intoxicated, Mrs. Butler."

A loud insolent laugh, and an incoherent attempt at denial, unhappily only proved the truth of the assertion.

Butler at once rose, replaced the decanters in the cellaret, of which he had the key, and then again turned and looked his wife fixedly in the face. She was sobered in a moment. For the *second* time that evil eye was upon her, dilating, as once before, with

the energy of concentrated passion, glaring like a dark spirit before her, subduing her wholly, instantly. Butler took his victim, not rudely, by the arm, and succeeded in leading her without exposure to her apartment, which was a different one from his own. Finding that she was able to retire without assistance, he shortly after quitted for the night.

The next day, as Butler had partly anticipated, his wife, shortly before dinner-time, sent to intimate that she would take that meal in her own room as on one or two previous occasions ; among others, on the day that Hilkiah had first dined there. Butler made no difficulty, and sent up a supply of wine, ample, in fact far too large, but not absolutely excessive. Soon after dinner he went up stairs to refer to Mrs. Butler on some trifling domestic matters. The cellaret keys were light, and as Butler took a letter from his pocket, to which it was necessary to refer, they fell upon the carpet without noise, and apparently unobserved by him. No sooner had he quitted the room than Mrs. Butler, who had eagerly watched for his departure, sprang forward and seized the coveted prize. A search took place for the keys in the course of the evening. Mrs. Butler looked everywhere, and kept them safe in her

own pocket. Butler opportunely discovered that he had a duplicate in his possession, and the investigation dropped. Henceforth, as we have intimated, Mrs. Butler lived almost entirely in her own apartment, solacing herself for this seclusion by frequent *nocturnal* visits to the dining-room, where she systematically replenished her private stock from the contents of the cellaret, which her husband, with great consideration, made a point of keeping well supplied for that purpose, although not in a quantity to tend to any dangerous excess. Often did poor Lucy pause by her mother's door, longing to enter and pour forth the full tide of her young affection and sympathy upon that breast, and at the same time filled with apprehension and dismay, not only at the more recent change in Mrs. Butler's appearance, but also at certain inexplicable sounds, the stertorous breathing or tipsy mutterings of the unhappy woman within, which Lucy fancied, with a thrill of wild terror, might be the results of her long-cherished grief; perhaps the manifestations of the fatal disorder itself in her mother's worn frame. Once or twice the trembling girl even tried the handle, but each time she found the door locked on the inside. At last, fearing that even

if the opportunity for conversation offered, it might only add to the disquietude which it was Mrs. Butler's evident wish to cherish in solitary musing, and unwilling even to wear the appearance of acting the spy upon her privacy, Lucy gradually desisted from her ineffectual attempts.

CHAP. XV.

“As hunters o’er the snowy plain
Of rude *Æmathia* chase the hare;
As stoops the falcon from the skies
Upon the ringdove’s nest, its prize.”
HOM. *Od.* I. xxxvii. 17.

AND now, shut out from all external companionship and sympathy, her mind forced back in dreamy monotonous contemplation upon itself, the deadly struggle for life and reason indeed began with Lucy Akehurst. Of Harcourt, as we have said, she never allowed herself even to think; it was her first resolution when she learnt the fatal secret of her family, and she determined that, cost what it would, it should be kept inviolate. Immediately after despatching the letter to him which we have mentioned at the beginning of the last chapter, she took out from its usual repository near her heart, a lock of his hair, the only present of which their brief courtship had yet admitted, and after one long, passionate kiss, laid it by (she could not bring herself to destroy it) in a drawer which she seldom opened, burying the

precious relic at the same time under a mass of papers and sketches, where it was certain never again to meet her eye. And then forcibly and for ever she endeavoured to shut out from her thoughts the crowding memories of the past, and she succeeded. Once only was her resolution sorely tried. A few days after the despatch of her letter, which had been delayed by cross posts, an answer arrived from Harcourt and was enclosed by Hilkiah to Mr. Butler. The latter had full confidence in Lucy; he judged from the expressions in her own letters that her resolve was deliberately adopted and would not be broken; and, without thinking it necessary to open the reply, he left it for Lucy on the drawing-room table almost as soon as it arrived. A few hours afterwards she requested a few minutes' conversation with him. The assassin and his victim confronted each other; the former, bland and courteous, but masking under a smile of easy good-nature the remorseless purpose which he had conceived and thus far executed; the latter guileless and unsuspecting, betraying, in her quivering lip and clouded eye, the feelings with which her young heart throbbed, but struggling for composure and self-control. Lucy spoke first.

"Mr. Butler," said she, "I ought, perhaps, to

have taken an earlier opportunity of saying what I have now to tell you, but I find it very difficult to approach the subject. Circumstances now compel me to do so. Mr. Butler, I overheard the whole of your conversation with Mr. Owen in the drawing-room, a few evenings since."

Butler gave a well-acted start, accompanied with a look in which was surprise mingled with extreme compassion. Lucy continued,

"I found the topic related to myself almost before I was aware that any one was speaking. I ought, perhaps, to have apprised you at once of my presence, but my tongue refused to do so; I could not speak, I could not move; I was fascinated, like one in a trance. I thank you heartily," continued Lucy, with a sweet smile of gratitude, "for the sympathy you then expressed both for my mother and myself. Oh! Mr. Butler, be kind to her; I fear she much wants your help. I much fear, at times, that the reserve she has maintained so long as to this terrible secret may have preyed upon her own mind unduly. Would that the evil might be confined to myself, for whom it seems destined, and not involve *her* in the consequences. But I am forgetting my object in speaking to you," Lucy added, after a pause. "You doubtless know the circumstances of my ac-

quaintance with Mr. Harcourt. When my mother refused (I now know but too well why) her sanction to our engagement, although Mr. Harcourt and myself both determined, unhesitatingly, to comply with her wishes, we still cherished some hope that in the course of time the obstacle whatever it was might be removed. *Now*, I know that it never can be. On the day following your conversation with Mr. Owen, I wrote to Mr. Harcourt, to say this; to say that we must never again meet, never be anything to each other henceforth but strangers; we must be for ever *wholly* separated. I did not state my reasons, which I saw clearly I was not entitled to do, but I entreated him to accept my determination as final, and requested him not to reply to the letter in any way. To-day I have received what I conclude is an answer from him; I place it in your hands unopened. I would not have troubled you with this matter, but I am unwilling to trespass upon my mother with my own unhappiness, when she has so much to undergo already; and the subject does not admit of delay. I will ask you, Mr. Butler, unless you think my mother equal to it, to return the letter to Mr. Harcourt, at Oxford, with a short note saying you do so by my request; saying that I still love him, as I ever

shall, oh! how deeply and tenderly, but that, indeed, indeed, he must think no more of me; that he must not attempt to see or write to me; that he must try and banish me even from his thoughts. Tell him that I ask this for *my* sake; they will be my last words to him. Oh! Mr. Butler, it is a hard, hard lot!" And a flood of passionate tears, the first she had shed since the fatal intelligence had reached her ears, came to Lucy's relief. Butler, with an air of much gentleness and sympathy, promised to comply with her wishes, and Lucy returned to her own room.

And now, darkly and heavily, her doom seemed to settle down upon her; the past excluded, for Harcourt's image was now in everything *there*; the present a weary blank; the future, dark and terrible beyond the powers of thought to contemplate. Hour by hour, and day by day, the introverted mind turned its gaze upon one object the most fatal to reason and intellect,—its own condition and functions; the subtle analysis and perpetual scrutiny of self. Shuddering and appalled, the poor girl watched as if by an inevitable fascination the minutest workings of thought, almost the very pulsation of the brain itself; the lightning flash of its rapid glance, the ever-changing current of ideas whirling through it

almost beyond the power of control, seemed to her in her terror the first indications of a disturbed intellect; hardly for any moment did she feel secure that the malady had not already commenced, that she was still entitled to rank as one of her kind, still the same as those she saw around her. And as she thus, by an attraction which she could not resist, found herself impelled perpetually to scrutinise the workings of her own mind, so furtively and eagerly she began to watch and observe *others*; whether they spoke and acted as she would have done; whether they noticed *her*; whether their looks expressed surprise or anxiety on her account. Even in the most ordinary actions of those with whom she was brought into casual intercourse during the day, she began to suspect some innuendo; the shrug of the shoulder, the secret whisper, the interchange of meaning glances. At times (and this grew more and more upon her) poor Lucy even feared to speak; she did not know whether her next words might not disclose some delusion, something that would cause the hearer to start with terror and dismay; silence was safest, or replying only in monosyllables;—she could hardly go wrong if she kept to this. There was another reason, too, for this. Lucy was conscious now at times of a painful tendency to

irritability in regard to small daily trifles, a feeling wholly foreign, as the reader may judge, to her real character, but which had naturally supervened upon it from the blight which had so suddenly and strangely fallen upon all the springs of enjoyment and happiness in her young heart. The apprehension of this was a great addition to her uneasiness. Resolved, if possible, as long as reason maintained its seat, never to indulge in any outward indications of a feeling so alien to her gentle nature, Lucy found her best protection on this account also in silence; even though it shut her up still more within herself, this was preferable, she thought, to the risk of uttering anything which might distress or wound others.

And thus, her cheek gradually growing paler, her tread less elastic, her thoughts losing every day their brightness and play, and becoming more and more locked up from outward expression, her very heart seeming to die out within her, and her whole self, soul, and mind, and body, to cower as it were under the fell advance and impending stroke of the destroyer, the poor girl, still gentle and loving to all, still without murmur or complaint, watched and waited hour by hour for her inevitable doom.

Butler, like a physician by his patient's bed, looked

on, meanwhile, with entire calmness, noticing the progressive symptoms of the case as they developed themselves in its successive stages, but not allowing himself to be diverted from the course of investigation by any misplaced sympathy or emotion. Butler was not naturally cruel; that is to say, there was no part of his disposition which received any gratification from the practice of cruelty for its own sake; but, at the same time, as the reader is well aware, he had not a moment's hesitation in pursuing any course of action which appeared necessary for his own purposes, however intense might be the suffering or calamity which it would entail upon others. In the present case he watched, as we have said, the terrible mental ordeal we have attempted, very faintly, to delineate (for who *can* paint the workings of the brain thrown back morbidly and helplessly upon itself?) with a deliberate scrutiny, in which no particle of remorse for one moment mingled. At length his assiduity was rewarded. It became evident that the fatal knowledge which had been communicated to her was telling slowly but surely upon poor Lucy's mind and heart, already wrung to the utmost by the apparently hopeless disappointment of her first love. Without exhibiting any symptoms of delusion or disease, it was impossible

not to see that a great shock had been communicated to the whole mental system; the organ was still sound, but its power was undermined, and it was gradually sinking into a depressed, almost perhaps an enfeebled state.

In this position of affairs, which Butler with his usual acuteness fully appreciated, he pondered his future plans long and doubtfully. The point to be considered, of course, was whether he should simply rest on his oars, allowing the present state of things to continue, and trusting to the slow operation of time to bring about the desired result, or whether he should adopt some more active although still safe measures? The former suggestion appeared the easier, but Butler discarded it after mature reflection. It now (the month of August was nearly at its close) wanted little more than a year and a half to Lucy's attaining her majority, a period at or even previously to which she was certain to be in communication with the trustees of the settlement; in addition to which there was even at present the risk of Frederick Akehurst's return at any moment from Italy. This Butler knew would at once derange his whole course of operations. Lucy's state of mind must, of course, attract her uncle's notice, and in half an hour he would doubtless be in possession

of the whole circumstances. The utter falsity of the statement as to Mrs. Butler's family would be easily demonstrated; and, with suspicion once aroused, the nefarious plan he had devised, although not legally punishable, would of course be finally demolished, and himself left a beggar and an outcast. Again, even supposing no such untoward occurrence to take place, the necessary communication a few months hence with the trustees must inevitably lead to the same result, unless some fatal effects either to the mind or the system had been produced in the meanwhile. On this, however, it was wholly impossible to calculate; Lucy's general health had not as yet undergone any perceptible injury, and even her mental depression, although it could hardly fail in the end to destroy the powers both of intellect and body, might still go on for months or even years without arriving at this crisis.

Dismissing, therefore, as impracticable the more simple alternative of allowing things to continue their present course, Butler, after some further consideration, decided with his usual promptitude and fertility of resource on adopting a plan which he hoped would bring matters to a more rapid termination. This was, for the family to migrate to some fashionable watering-place on the Continent;

eventually he fixed on Baden-Baden. A more superficial observer of character might have thought that such an expedition, and the round of gaiety and dissipation in which he proposed to engage on his arrival there, would have tended to dissipate the gloom and depression which had now settled upon Lucy's mind; but Butler judged otherwise. He knew that, although such diversions may serve to rally the intellect when it is suffering from the impact of some external disaster or sorrow, or has been tried by undue exertion; yet that where there is a deep-seated and life-long cause of uneasiness, something which we must bear about with us, unchanged and unchangeable, at every step and into every circle of gaiety and pleasure, the demands of society, instead of gradually withdrawing the thoughts from the subject which has before unduly pressed upon them, act with a violent compulsion, the recoil from which to the reality of our own state is more likely than anything else to disturb the balance of sense and reason. And he decided accordingly.

Having once fixed his plans, Butler lost no time in carrying them out. To Mrs. Butler the prospect of this expedition was delightful; it enabled her for the time even to dispense with those more dan-

gerous stimulants to which in the solitude of Plas Newydd she had latterly become somewhat improperly addicted. Poor Lucy's sensations, on being informed of the proposed plan, were very different. Gladly would she have laid down her weary head and slept in the quiet grave where her father and two brothers had gone before her; if this might not be (and she ever meekly committed the choice to a Higher Will), she desired nothing better than to await the fearful destiny which she felt was daily drawing nearer and nearer, either in Plas Newydd, or at least in some other quiet and secluded locality where she might bear her lot unmolested. The prospect of again mingling in general society, especially amid the round of dissipation which she knew would attend their visit to Baden-Baden, she looked forward to with unmixed terror. Still, the unselfish heart of the poor girl prevented her offering any opposition to the plan, even had she felt in a position to do so. The alacrity with which her mother had caught at it, and the evident change it had produced in the settled gloom of her manner, were quite sufficient to induce Lucy to acquiesce, at any rate without open remonstrance; and the arrangements were accordingly speedily completed. Hardly two days after Butler had decided on this alteration in his

plans, the servants were dismissed, the house and premises shut up (the former being left in the charge of a woman from the cottages near), and the family *en route* for their continental trip. They spent a day or two in London, where Butler completed some arrangements which had been pending for the last few weeks for the sale of his business, which he had now the opportunity of effecting on advantageous terms. At the same time, the necessary legal proceedings were completed for vesting in Butler, pursuant to his stipulation with his wife at the time of their marriage, the complete ownership of the Cheveleigh estates, subject of course to Lucy's interest under the settlement, and also to a provision which secured to Mrs. Butler during her life a fair share in the anticipated spoil. These matters of necessary business concluded, the party pursued their journey, and in little more than a week afterwards had arrived without misadventure at the brilliant capital of the Duchy of Baden.

We might fill many chapters with describing in detail the effect upon Lucy of the incessant round of gaiety into which she was now daily and nightly plunged, but we have not the heart to do it; and, in fact, we must now hurry to the conclusion of this part of our narrative. Those who know themselves

what a young and gentle heart is, wounded, hopelessly blighted in its deepest feelings, and then suddenly forced into a career of gaiety, the parody, as it were, of the soul's quenched mirth, may in some measure conceive the ordeal to which Lucy was thus exposed; but when to this came to be added the consciousness, never for an instant absent from the poor girl's mind, of the fearful end, the blank night of memory and being, the chain, the dungeon, the littered straw, the desolation and rayless gloom in which all this was to terminate, it is no wonder that reason and almost life succumbed under the vivid contrast. Day by day and night by night, *fête* followed on *fête*, excursion on excursion, dance on dance, excitement on excitement; gay flutterers hovered about her, admirers, even pretenders to her hand, embarrassed her steps, leaving her no time for thought, hardly even for memory. In the opera, on the parade, in every ride and walk, at home, at the *table d'hôte*, there was still the same throng and intolerable whirl of life, confusing, deafening, maddening. People wondered at the beautiful but impassive English girl, who sang so sweetly and played with so much taste and intellect, and yet whom it was impossible to engage in any conversation, or interest even in the most passing topic; while she

herself, heart-broken, half unconscious, a fire in her brain, the dart of her unseen enemy ever hovering round her, and ready at any moment, she felt, to strike down reason from the seat which it still occupied by a precarious and uncertain tenure, followed mechanically from place to place as she was led, almost wondering by what instinct she still played her part in the society in which she felt herself almost a pretender, and not unfrequently stealing a furtive glance at the faces by which she was surrounded, to ascertain by their expression whether her secret was still undiscovered, or whether they were not preparing to thrust her forth as a loathsome thing from their presence.

Butler meanwhile was a vigilant observer of all that passed. A very few days showed him that he had not been mistaken in his calculations, and that some catastrophe was now inevitable. It was not long in coming.

CHAP. XVI.

"The mountain home lies desolate."

VIRG. *Æn.* viii. 191.

THE 30th day of September, 18—, presented itself to two of the persons in whom our history is mainly interested, Lucy Akehurst and Mr. Edgar Harcourt, under a highly untoward aspect. We will briefly sketch its occurrences in both instances, commencing with the former.

The day in question was warm and fine, and a riding excursion had been projected to a ruin at some distance from Baden-Baden; Lucy and Mr. and Mrs. Butler were all to be of the party. The former, however, proved wholly unequal to join the ride; mute and abstracted, her hands folded listlessly in front of her, her temples hot and throbbing, her eyes gazing intently forward, as at some unexplained object, it was found impossible to induce her to move from the chair by her *toilette* where she had placed herself on returning from her untasted breakfast. She replied with a sweet but vacant smile to


the requests and almost commands that were urged for her attendance ; at length, on a sign from Butler, her mother desisted from pressing her.

Mrs. Butler was by no means indisposed to adopt this course, as Lucy's presence was an annoyance and restraint to her in many ways ; it diverted the attention of some of the small fry of flatterers, whom, with a faint revival of her former pretensions at taking a leading position in fashionable life, she had again for a brief space contrived to rally round her ; while at the same time it operated as a tacit check upon the pleasures of the table, in which, now that the first excitement of the visit to Baden-Baden had passed off, Mrs. Butler was again disposed to indulge more freely than was by any means compatible with decorum. Lucy was accordingly left unmolested in her own room ; Butler, who did not care to be long absent from his charge at this crisis, also made some excuse for declining the party, and occupied himself with business and English correspondence in the sitting-room of their lodging, which consisted of two upper floors in a small but pleasant house in one of the best situations of the town.

The day gradually wore on, without Mrs. Butler's return. Butler ordered an early dinner at home for

himself and Lucy, at which the latter tasted a few morsels, and was then allowed to retire to her own apartment. In the course of an hour or two the sun set, and the brief twilight of that time of year rapidly gave place to dusk. A servant of the house, by Butler's desire, brought Lucy a cup of tea soon afterwards, and she was then left alone; Mrs. Butler was still absent. An hour or two more passed, Lucy still sitting in the chair where the servant had left her in nearly the same attitude that we have described in the morning, with the untasted tea by her side, and apparently without in any way realising the lapse of time. At length a violent noise attended with some scuffling was heard in the flagged passage which ran along the basement story of the house; this increased rather than diminished as the persons from whom it proceeded appeared to be ascending the staircase which led to the two floors occupied by Mr. Butler's family. There was something in the sound apparently which, for the first time in the day, roused Lucy from her stupor. She started from her chair, threw the door open, and with strained ear caught and seemed endeavouring to identify the voices which now proceeded from the passage leading to the sitting-room. Even in her depressed and enfeebled state this was no difficult

task. The voice was her mother's; the tones, unmistakeably, those of intoxication! A chill shudder ran through the unhappy girl's frame, and with an excitement proportioned to her previous languor and apathy, she descended almost at one bound the stairs which led to the first floor. Mrs. Butler was in the hands of two strong men, whose assistance had been necessary to force her return home. Her husband, probably not without some suspicion of the real state of things, had as night drew on gone in quest of her to one of the principal hotels in which some of the other members of the morning's riding party had rooms. He found that she had returned to the town with them; the delicate intimation that she appeared not quite well, conveyed to a person of Mr. Butler's discernment the fact that she had indulged in the convivialities of a kind of picnic, in which the ride was to terminate, to an extent which had attracted general notice. He pushed his inquiries further, and next heard of the object of his search at the *rouge et noir* table. She had staked a few sovereigns, and won; she was about to try her chance a second time, when her unsteady gait and demeanour attracted the attention of one or two gentlemen in the room, who either from consideration, or to prevent a scene, induced her to quit the



gaming-house, escorting her part of the way home. They then by her own desire left her, the fresh air and exercise having apparently brought her sufficiently to herself to enable her to pursue her route. Instead of doing this, however, Mrs. Butler, when her companions quitted her, had returned by a by-street to the more frequented part of the town, and entered a *café* of good repute, where, after a somewhat protracted search, her husband discovered her just as her potations had reached a stage at which the waiters had deemed it necessary to consult the proprietor of the establishment as to the best course of proceeding. At the present moment, Mrs. Butler was struggling with her two attendants (her husband kept out of sight), pouring forth at the same time a torrent of abuse, mingled at intervals, strangely enough, with the deep inspirations, sighs, ejaculations, and other expressions of a lamentable and despairing nature, with which, as the reader is aware, the worthy lady had in her palmy days been wont to intersperse her conversation, either as exciting sympathy for herself, or as a mode of producing and keeping up an uncomfortable impression in regard to their own circumstances or those of their friends in the minds of those whom she addressed; but which now, delivered in a drunken

tone of maudlin sentiment, produced an effect so intensely ludicrous as almost to overpower the horror of the scene. It was probably these latter words, touching some chord of early association, which had startled Lucy from her stupor; but at the same time, the recollection of recent occurrences was still sufficiently strong for her to connect what she now witnessed with various indications during the last few months, hitherto unintelligible to her or referred to some other cause, but which the present occurrence at once exhibited in their true character. For a few moments the poor girl appeared paralysed: she then advanced, with the intention apparently of speaking to one of the men who held Mrs. Butler, when the latter, seeing Lucy, suddenly freed herself from restraint, and with a violent impulse of rage aimed a blow at her with her clenched fist. Lucy instinctively shrunk back, and Mrs. Butler, missing her stroke, finally with a drunken reel and lurch deposited herself at full length on the floor. In the commotion which followed Lucy was unnoticed. With a suppressed cry of "Oh! Mother," the terrified girl fled wildly upstairs, and locking and double locking her door, as if she apprehended pursuit, again resumed her solitary vigil. But it was not in stupor or lassitude

now. The quick fever coursed through her veins; her arms were tossed wildly over her head; with incoherent mutterings, at one time recalling the late fearful scene, at another reproducing in painful contrast scraps and snatches of the old pleasant days with Harcourt at Plas Newydd, or the still earlier period of her childhood in her father's house, she paced the floor, hour after hour, with a restless uneven step. Suddenly she paused with a start of terror, cowering back, and retreating farther and farther into one corner of the room, as if some hideous object had arisen in front of her. The two stalwart figures that had held her mother, now tossed between them, as if in sport, a globe of molten fire; they seemed to be driving it nearer and nearer to her; she felt it scorching her face, her eyebrows; already the fire of it was in her brain. With one bound the affrighted girl sprung to the opposite side of the room, where the door was. She could not unlock it, but the staple was old and rusty, and yielded to the pressure of her hand. Swift as thought, with a rapid noiseless step, she again descended the stairs to the first floor, which was now wholly deserted, and gaining the basement story unbarred the door which formed the principal entrance, and passed out into the dark night.

It was not until late on the following day that her flight was discovered. The outer door as well as that leading to the first floor were indeed found open in the morning, but it was supposed that this had happened in the confusion consequent on Mrs. Butler's entrance ; and some hours had passed before the servant of the house, going by Butler's direction to knock at Lucy's door, found the room deserted. The broken lock and the state of the bed, which had evidently not been slept in, at once explained what had occurred ; some portions of Lucy's dress which she had removed, probably feeling that they chafed her in the heat of the fever, also lay on a chair. A search through the town and neighbourhood was immediately instituted by the police, who separated into several parties. At length Butler who had accompanied one of these found the victim of his machinations, cowering half-undressed, and shivering with the cold and ague-fit of the fever, under the arch of a small bridge about a mile from the town. Still apparently possessed with the desire of escaping from the object of her terrified gaze, Lucy had forced her way through the bushes, and taken shelter in this spot ; the stream was almost dry, and the country road over it being little used had prevented her retreat being dis-

covered at an earlier hour. A carriage was at once procured to convey her home, and the journey was accomplished without much inconvenience, the vehicle keeping to the by-streets to avoid attracting the crowd which the wild gestures and at times terrified shrieks of the sufferer might otherwise have collected.

Butler had, of course, arranged the course of proceedings to be adopted in the long-anticipated event of the present catastrophe occurring. An English physician of considerable reputation at that time practised at Baden-Baden; and as Butler's aim was now, as it had been during his whole residence there, to give the utmost publicity to Lucy's state, especially among his fellow-countrymen, he had no hesitation in requesting the attendance of this gentleman. Dr. — arrived within half an hour of the time Lucy reached her lodgings, and at once pronounced her to be suffering from brain-fever for which he prescribed the usual remedies. These were attended with success, and in a few days Lucy was pronounced out of danger, although her recovery would probably be tedious and require the utmost vigilance and quiet.

The gradual return of convalescence enabled Dr. — to form some judgment of the probable result

of Lucy's illness, as to which Butler had more than once questioned him, intimating at the same time his apprehensions that her mind might suffer permanently from the severe shock it had sustained; but Dr. — had declined giving any decided opinion until the acute symptoms of the malady had passed. Now, however, he did so. One morning Dr. — had sat for some time in Lucy's room and put several questions to her, to which she replied, feebly indeed (for she was so reduced by the illness that the physician had to put his ear close to her mouth to catch the words), but still coherently and without excitement. The effort appeared to have exhausted Lucy's strength, and she sank into a profound sleep; Dr. — continued watching her. After a few minutes, Butler entered the room. "I believe I can answer your question now," said the physician, after the usual compliments of the day. "I have carefully watched the symptoms of the young lady's case in their present stage, and I feel more and more convinced that there is no organic disease. The brain appears to me perfectly sound and healthy, and there is an absence, not only of any positive delusion, but also of excitement in reference to any particular subject or class of subjects, from which I augur very favourably. At the

same time, my dear Sir, I must not conceal from you that the position of things is very critical. I am of opinion that, with great care, both mind and body will recover their tone ; but the blow has been a very severe one, and it has left the mental powers especially in an enfeebled and depressed state, in which the consequences of any indiscretion would be most serious. You will do well, I think, as soon

to travel,
ations here
d its com-
at residence

Dr. —,"
d not enter
onths."

"Certainly," answered Dr. —. "Her return to anything like gaiety would be attended with the most serious consequences. It would probably bring on some aggravated form of the complaint, or even total derangement. But I must be off now ; I see it is late."

Dr. — returned however from the door, as he was about to make his exit. "I presume," he said, in rather a lowered voice, "that there has been nothing wrong in the young lady's family, on either

side; no insanity or mental weakness of any kind? If there had been it would materially affect my judgment of her case. The present attack, especially as there does not appear to have been any adequate cause for it, might then very possibly be only the premonitory symptom of something more serious."

Butler was for a moment staggered by this question, which he had not anticipated, and slightly paused before he answered. Dr. — was a very different person from Hilkiah Owen; the occurrence had been much talked of among the English at Baden-Baden, and a repetition of the statement he had made to Hilkiah might very possibly reach the ears of some members of the family, and lead to detection and exposure. A glance, however, at the unconscious sleeper on the bed, enabled him to reply, with perfect composure, "No, indeed, nothing of the kind; nothing whatever." And the physician took his leave.

It was still two or three weeks before Lucy was able to be moved, and the period was one of some anxiety to Butler, who, besides the chance of interruption from other quarters, was not without apprehension that Dr. — might question Lucy on the origin of her illness, and thus discover the discrepancy between the statement made to him by

Butler, and that which Lucy had overheard at Plas Newydd. It was an improbable event, and one which Butler's calmer judgment always enabled him to dismiss from his thoughts as not involving any danger; but in the detail connected with the commission of great crimes men are usually disturbed by small and unlikely causes. The time passed, however, without the occurrence of anything to justify either ground of apprehension, and, in fact, without incident of any kind. A few days after the physician's visits had ceased, Mr. Butler and his family, still unattended, as they had been throughout their residence abroad, by any servant of their own, disappeared from Baden-Baden, leaving no intimation of their route either at the post-office or elsewhere. Butler had, of course, previously satisfied all demands; and in a few weeks the circumstances of their residence there, which had at first excited considerable attention and sympathy, were lost sight of and by the close of the season wholly forgotten.

In the custody of its remorseless foes went forth, nobody knew whither, that young life, crushed and beaten down, without succour, without resource. Would the wrung heart now bear up against its appointed sorrow? would the tottering reason maintain

its seat, or quench its lamp for ever in oblivion and utter darkness?

* * * *

By one of those singular coincidences which happen less frequently than we should have supposed from the apparent absence of any practical result which attends them, it was on the same thirtieth of September, and nearly at the same hour which witnessed the climax of Lucy's mental sufferings, that Harcourt again found himself on the familiar road to Plas Newydd. It is necessary for the reader's information briefly to recapitulate what had occurred in the interval as regards our hero. Butler had returned to him his own letter, as Lucy had requested, apprising him briefly of his own marriage to her mother, and adding Lucy's message. Butler had opened Harcourt's letter (with more elaborateness indeed than he had found necessary in his previous experiment in the same line), and was gratified to find that the contents, although filled with passionate appeals to Lucy to alter her decision, and, above all, to inform him of the exact nature of the fatal obstacle to which she referred, were not such as to occasion him any apprehension, or threaten the derangement of his plans. The liberty which had been taken with the seal, of course, was wholly un-

known to Harcourt, and with bitter grief he consigned his returned letter to the flames. Lucy's earnest request prevented him again addressing her, but he wrote a few days afterwards to Mrs. Butler, who, her husband stated, had been prevented by indisposition from herself sending Lucy's message. The answer this time was from Mrs. Butler, of course under Mr. Butler's dictation. Its tone was decided, although not unfriendly; it expressed the writer's opinion that after what had passed the subject ought not to have been re-opened; at the same time, it assured Harcourt that she had not so far forgotten her own youthful emotions as not to make allowance for his, and that the grief and disappointment he was doubtless suffering had her sincere sympathy. The writer, however, put it to his own right feeling to forbear any further pressing a suit which she had, for causes implying no slight upon himself, been compelled to discountenance, and which, it must be evident to him, could now only inflict pain upon the object of it. With some further expressions of a kindly nature to himself, Mrs. Butler closed the letter, adding her hope that this distressing correspondence would now cease.

Harcourt felt that the tone of this letter precluded him from attempting any reply to it; but, at the

same time, he found it every day more impossible to go on without one effort to see Lucy herself, or even if he should fail in this, or be deterred by the fear of distressing her from seeking an actual interview, without at least ascertaining that she was safe and well. One glimpse of that dear form, even the mere shadow of it flitting across the windows of her room, would give him, he thought, fortitude for the present to endure this mysterious and terrible separation with more calmness. Under the impulse of these feelings, Harcourt, after a few weeks' interval of almost intolerable suspense, at length took the coach to the post-town of which we have more than once spoken; and, arriving there rather late in the afternoon, at once started on his walk to Plas Newydd. It was already dark, as he had anticipated it would be, by the time he reached Rhos-y-Gelynnion; this favoured his design, as it obviated any chance of recognition by those who might have reported the circumstance at Plas Newydd. Dashing from his eyes a few hot tears, as he skirted the lake, the scene of so many happy memories, and emerged upon the grey tower and clustering cottages of Llanfihangel; and half disposed to envy the lot of his venerable friend who now slept so peacefully in the quiet church-yard, Harcourt pursued the road, often

trodden by himself and Lucy in their walks, along the upper valley of the Hirnant. It was a still, serene evening, rather cold; there was a young moon, and the stars hung with a bright lustre over the wall of shadowy mountains which enclosed the glen on each side. At first, Harcourt strode rapidly along, hardly conscious of surrounding objects; as he drew nearer to the house, his pace slackened, and he found it necessary to discuss with himself the precise purpose of his visit to Plas Newydd, as well as the means of bringing it to a successful termination. To procure an interview with Lucy herself was, he feared, almost impossible; supposing other difficulties overcome, it seemed more than doubtful whether she would herself have consented to it; indeed, Harcourt could not but feel that she might have been entitled to charge him with unkindness in attempting to obtain a meeting after her express request to the contrary. He decided however on at least entering the house, where he had been a favourite with high and low; from old Jenkin or some of the female servants he might at least ascertain how matters stood, whether Lucy was still in health and safety, whether there was any prospect of his being admitted to see her. The tall chimneys and peaceful gables of the old house stood out dark

and sombre against the sky, as he approached the gates, and deviating from the front entrance found his way by the imperfect light to the outbuildings adjoining, from which there was a side door into the kitchen department. To his surprise, this door was shut and barred on the inside; it had formerly always been open for family use until a late hour, and he had himself frequently entered the house this way. Harcourt shook the door, but received no answer; he looked up at the kitchen windows; there was no appearance of light in them; the stables and offices were all closed, and looked solitary and deserted. Harcourt now passed round to the terrace-walk, but with the same result; not a vestige of habitation appeared within doors; the paths and flower-borders outside were evidently untended; — the house was unoccupied. Passing round to the front, Harcourt found the same indications of neglect, the same blank solitude. It was far too early for the inmates to have retired to rest; it was clear they must have quitted the place. Harcourt raised his hand to the knocker, and produced a loud and almost angry summons, which rang through the empty hall and passages, and shook the decayed casements overhead.

At first, it elicited no reply. At length, as Har-

court still persisted, a faint and almost imperceptible gleam of light in a window on the upper story somewhat brightened, and the lattice being cautiously unbarred, a female head and shoulders presented themselves at the opening.

Harcourt eagerly inquired where the family were. No answer was returned for a minute or two; apparently, the guardian of this fortalice was speculating on the character and probable intention of her visitor. Having arrived, it would seem, at a conclusion far from satisfactory, she hastily shut the casement again, with the favourite Welsh rejoinder of "Dim Saesnach" ("No Saxon"), a phrase only too well known to the belated traveller, who, after the interval of six centuries, still reaps the benefits of a national antipathy, masked at the present day under an assumed air of stupidity and ignorance. Vainly did Harcourt again and again ply the knocker. No further answer was vouchsafed to him; and, with a frantic gesture of agony and despair, he strode down the avenue of the wailing firs, and passed through the decaying gateway into the road.

On his way to Plas Newydd, Harcourt had pictured to himself the kind of melancholy satisfaction with which, even if he failed in procuring an interview

with Lucy, he might revisit some of the nearer scenes of their young love. Often and often in thought he had pressed his lips on the wooden bench by the drawing-room window, where they had sat together (the scene, alas! of darker occurrences since that time); he had dreamt of gazing in unseen at the occupants of the dear drawing-room, its sombre panelling seeming to pulsate and grow bright under the influence of Lucy's laughing tones and happy smile; he had even planned an excursion by the light of the young moon to the unforgotten well of Tyn-y-Groes, and there once again in fancy heard the plighted vows of love, and for a moment bridged over the dark gulf which now parted those who had been bound by a tie which seemed indissoluble. But he had no heart for these things now. Rapidly retracing his way down the valley, he passed the dim tower of Llanfihangel, bending his head as his steps echoed in the hollow way between the churchyard and the river in mute supplication to the Father of souls, at least to shield and protect her who seemed now snatched from his own charge, which would have guarded her with its last drop of life's blood; and again skirting the lake, found himself in the dingy street of Rhos-y-Ge-lynion. Harcourt had intended to pause here, with

the view of making some inquiries of Hilkiah Owen, but a glare of light from the chapel, and a chorus of voices from within, combining in one of the unmelodious and dirge-like strains which we have already described, apprized him that that worthy was at present employed in conducting the devotions of his flock, and could not of course be disturbed. Hardly knowing whether to regret this further disappointment (for there was something about Hilkiah which made Harcourt shrink from admitting him, even by the cursory question he proposed, to anything like a confidence on the subject which lay so near his heart), the young lover pursued his course down the lower valley. As he descended between its rugged cliffs, the faint moonlight and lustre of the stars became obscured, and a dark cloud, wrapping the objects on his path in gloom and shadow, fell like a blight from heaven upon the past and future of his life.

APPENDIX.

Dreams of my Childhood.

(See page 216.)

Ver. 1. Dreams of my child-hood, in sad-ness a-wak-ing, Crush'd

The first system of music is in G major (one sharp) and 6/8 time. It consists of a treble and a bass staff. The treble staff has a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 6/8 time signature. The melody begins with a half note G4, followed by a quarter note A4, then a quarter note B4, and a quarter note C5. The bass staff has a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 6/8 time signature. The bass line begins with a half note G2, followed by a quarter note A2, then a quarter note B2, and a quarter note C3. The lyrics are: "Ver. 1. Dreams of my child-hood, in sad-ness a-wak-ing, Crush'd".

leaves of the gar-land, why mourn your de - cay ?

The second system of music continues the melody from the first system. It consists of a treble and a bass staff. The treble staff has a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 6/8 time signature. The melody begins with a half note G4, followed by a quarter note A4, then a quarter note B4, and a quarter note C5. The bass staff has a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 6/8 time signature. The bass line begins with a half note G2, followed by a quarter note A2, then a quarter note B2, and a quarter note C3. The lyrics are: "leaves of the gar-land, why mourn your de - cay ?".

Blithe sings the lark when the young dawn is break-ing, But

The third system of music continues the melody from the second system. It consists of a treble and a bass staff. The treble staff has a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 6/8 time signature. The melody begins with a half note G4, followed by a quarter note A4, then a quarter note B4, and a quarter note C5. The bass staff has a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 6/8 time signature. The bass line begins with a half note G2, followed by a quarter note A2, then a quarter note B2, and a quarter note C3. The lyrics are: "Blithe sings the lark when the young dawn is break-ing, But".

sad - ly the night - in - gale wails the spent day.

For the second verse the following alterations are necessary, according to their references : —

A B

Verse 2.

Lonely and dark is the home of bright faces,
 The voices I loved are now strange to mine ear ;
 Flowers die, but summer shall fill their void places,
 But the hearth of the desolate, oh ! who shall cheer ?

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.

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